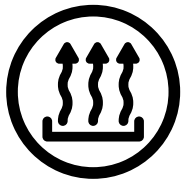




# ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES



## WARM-UP

Have you ever had a public speaking experience that did not turn out as you had hoped? What happened?

*Pray for your time together as a group.*

*Read out loud as a group*

## BACKGROUND SUMMARY:

Where we see Paul in this part of the story is stuck in many tricky situations. Paul is seized by a Jewish mob in Jerusalem after being falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple, which was considered a serious offense. The violent uproar causes Roman soldiers to intervene and arrest Paul to prevent his death. A multitude of things happen: Jews conspire to falsely accuse and kill Paul; Roman soldiers arrest, abuse, then treat him kindly after Paul shares his Roman citizenship; and Paul gives testimony before the Jewish council and the Roman governor Felix. Paul is caught in a political nightmare where the Roman governor doesn't want to anger the Jews so he leaves Paul in house arrest for 2 years. Then a new governor takes over, Festus. He, like Felix, finds no guilt with Paul and decides to bring him to trial in Jerusalem. Paul, following the comfort and vision from the Lord, invokes his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar instead. Festus honors this and agrees to take Paul to Rome instead. Then King Agrippa visits and desires to hear Paul's case before he leaves for Rome.

*Read out loud as a group*

## ACTS 26:1-23 (NIV)

1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: 2 "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

4 "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem.

*Read out loud as a group*

## **ACTS 26:1-23 (NIV)**

5 They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. 6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. 7 This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? 9 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities. 12 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' 19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

*Read out loud as a group*

"It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

"This proverb appears often in classical writings. Daniel Fuller explains that it was 'often used by the Greeks 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 futile for him to try any longer to work against Christ as it would be for an ox to kick against a plowman's goad.'"

- The NIV Application Commentary: Acts, Ajith Fernando, pg 595



**How does this courtroom scene show the upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God?**

*Possible Answers: the gospel seems to flip the dynamics of the courtroom. Paul speaks with authority while Agrippa listens. Paul is the one who is spiritually safe while Agrippa is not. Just like the cross looked like defeat but it was the greatest victory.*



**What features do you see in Paul's defense to Agrippa?**

*Possible Answers: Appeals to Agrippa's knowledge/background, shares his own experiences/story, sharing not just to Agrippa but also to everyone else in the room.*



**In his defense, Paul is vulnerable with his failures. Paul's testimony and conversion is even greater and more dramatic because of them. How have you seen God use even your failures, mistakes, or sin to bring about His purposes and your growth?**

*Possible Answers: answers may vary.*



**Paul doesn't hide parts of the gospel in his defense to make them more palatable. Where have you felt pressure to soften or hide hard truths of the gospel or of faith in general? What are the good intentions behind that and why might that cause more harm than help?**

*Possible Answers: Answers may vary. The good intention behind it is desiring more people to know Jesus, to not turn them off, to keep them listening, to not be like other christians, and a genuine desire to use a good "manner" when talking about hard things. This isn't inherently bad. BUT, when we water down so much of the truth to make it palatable, what part of the truth is left? Jesus' love saved us from His wrath. We can lead with love in hard subjects and not wrath too.*



**What are helpful reminders that we can tell ourselves when we feel like shying away from "harsher" truths of the gospel?**

*Possible Answers: I'm ok in Jesus, my faith and identity are not in what this person thinks of me, ultimately they are rejecting Jesus, Jesus can empathize with our feelings of rejection. 1 Corinthians 1:22-25.*



**If you were to share your own defense of the Gospel, what would you include? Why would you include those features?**

*Possible Answers: things you've learned from classes, aspects of your story or that of other people I know, Scripture, apologetics, etc.*

Read out loud as a group

## ACTS 26:24-32 (NIV)

24 At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

25 "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

29 Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

30 The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. 31 After they left the room, they began saying to one another, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."

32 Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."



What types of responses have you encountered when sharing the Gospel? How did this impact you?

*Possible Answers: Answers may vary*



Paul is unshaken by Agrippa's mockery. How does his response reflect his sense of identity?

*Possible Answers: His identity is in who Christ says he is not who Agrippa says he is. In Paul's forgiveness not his actions (good or bad).*

## DISCUSSION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY



- In what ways are you struggling to believe your position in Christ? How do you apply that truth when you face discouragement?
- What are good indicators when you are more concerned with being right than being a witness?