

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself.”

But his great address before the King is not so much a defence of himself; he speaks of the Lord and His gracious dealings with himself. The Lord’s own words concerning Paul are again accomplished.

“He is a chosen vessel with me to bear my name before Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel” (9:15). He bears now witness to His Name before a King.

I. The Address of the Apostle Paul (Verses 2-23).

II. The Interruption by Festus and the Appeal to the King (Verses 24-29).

III. The Verdict (Verses 30-32).

I. The Address of the Apostle Paul. This is no doubt the greatest of his addresses. It has several parts.

1. *The Opening Words.*

“I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently” (Verses 2-3).

These are gracious words. Even as he stands in chains the great Apostle counts himself happy. His happiness consisted in the knowledge that he was now privileged to bear witness of His Lord and the Gospel committed to him before such an audience. What an opportunity it was to him and how he rejoiced that he could speak of Him, whom he served. He also honored the King by a brief remark, in which he expressed his delight in speaking before one who was so fully acquainted with Jewish customs and questions.

2. A Restatement of his Past Life as a Pharisee.

“My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Verses 4-11).

Similar statements we find in his first address as prisoner when he addressed the Jewish multitudes in the temple (Chapter 22:3-5). Here, however, he enters more into the character of the accusation brought against him.

He had lived conscientiously as a Pharisee. As such he had believed and trusted in the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers. The twelve tribes, that is all Israel serving God instantly, expected the realization of this promised hope. This hope is the national one of the nation’s future glory and blessing. But it centers in the Person of the Messiah, Christ. He is the hope of Israel, abundantly borne witness to by the Prophets of God, whose testimony concerning the future of Israel is always linked with the Holy One, the Redeemer, and His manifestation in the midst of Israel. Thus Paul establishes the fact that he is one in hope and spirit with the nation in their expectation of the fulfilment of the promises of God. And on account of this hope, he told the King he was accused of the Jews.

At once he touches upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? The whole history of Israel bears witness to the fact, that God can bring life from the dead. The very origin of the nation demonstrates this, for Sarah’s womb was a grave and God brought life out of that grave.

Many promises of the past vouched for God’s power to raise the dead. The nation had this promise that spiritual and national death is to give way to spiritual and national life (Ezekiel 37:1-15; Hosea 6:1-3).

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ proved Him to be the Holy One and the Hope of Israel. In this sense Peter speaks of His resurrection. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”** (I Peter 1:3). The grave of the Lord Jesus was for the disciples the grave of their national hope, but His resurrection from the dead the revival of that hope.

Then once more the Apostle tells of how he persecuted the saints and did many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the darkest picture he gives here of himself. He shut up the saints in prison, he voted their death, he punished them in synagogues, he compelled them to blaspheme, he raved against them and even persecuted them in strange cities. And upon that dark background he can now flash forth once more the story of his conversion.

3. The Heavenly Vision.

“Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee” (Verses 12-17).

Once more, for the last time in this book, the record of his remarkable experience is given. As we have given an exposition of it before we need not enter into it again. The comparison of the different records will show that they are complementary and not contradictory as often claimed.

He tells here especially of the quality of the light which burst from heaven upon him. It was above the brightness of the sun, the glory light of Him, whose members on earth he had persecuted. Some day the same glory will flash forth once more and that future manifestation of the Lord will mark the conversion of the nation. Paul’s experience is a type of all this.

Then he had received his divine commission. He was to be a minister and a witness of things he had seen and he were yet to see. The latter refer to the subsequent revelations he received from the Lord. But his special ministry was to the Gentiles **“unto whom now I send thee.”**

4. The Gospel Message Declared.

“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Verse 18).

This may be looked upon as the center of the Apostle’s address.

Now the proper moment had arrived to state the Gospel message before this company. It is a terse statement of the message which the Lord had committed ‘unto him. All the elements of the Gospel are contained in this verse. There is first the condition of man by nature. Eyes, which are blind, in darkness, under the power of Satan. The eyes are to be opened, and through the Gospel man is turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

In Colossians 1:12 the same is stated. Then the blessings of conversion. Forgiveness of sins and an inheritance. Faith is the means of all this; sanctification, that is separation, in conversion “**by faith that is in me.**” One wonders if the Holy Spirit even then did not bless the message to some heart and the Grace of God bestowed these blessings upon some believing sinners. It may have been so. The day will make it known.

5. The Obedience to the Heavenly Vision.

“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Verses 19-23).

He had been obedient to the heavenly vision. How else could it be? His whole life was given up in service to Him, whose Glory he had seen, whose Grace had so wonderfully saved him. In verse 20 he sums up the untiring activity of his life and service. He tells King Agrippa in a brief sentence of the murderous attempt of the Jews. Furthermore he gives God the glory for having kept him through the dark experience since his arrest so that he can continue his witnessing. All his teaching and preaching had been in agreement with the testimony of the Prophets. Christ should suffer, rise from the dead and blessing for the people (Jews) and the Gentiles should be the result.

II. The Interruption by Festus and the Appeal to the King.

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (Verses 24-29).

Festus, the Gentile, ignorant of much what Paul so blessedly declared and yet deeply impressed with the prisoner’s eloquent enthusiasm, interrupted him. “**Thou art beside thyself**” - “**much learning doth make thee mad.**” Thus the Lord himself had been charged (Mark 3:21; John 10:20).

Paul in a courteous answer tells the startled Festus that his words were not words of a mad man, but words of truth and soberness. The words of a Spirit guided and Spirit filled man are always such. Then Paul turns to the King and appeals to him.

The Jewish King knew that the things he had declared were not inventions of a diseased brain but facts. The facts he had related had not taken place in some obscure corner. The King knew of the appearance of Christ, of His death and all the other related events. Perhaps the uneasiness of the King as the matter was directly put before him led to the bold question of the prisoner.

The one who was questioned concerning his life now turns questioner. “**King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I knew that thou believest.”**

The King was thus brought face to face with the important message. Decision is demanded. Could he, the Jewish King, in the presence of such an audience of Jews and Gentiles commit himself? I know that thou believest, was the declaration of the inspired messenger. He could not deny the fact that he did believe the prophets and he would not confess that he accepted the facts as stated by Paul and that he believed.

It was a clever word by which he escaped the difficulty. “**Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.**” The meaning is rather “*by a little more persuasion you might make me a Christian.*” No doubt conviction had taken hold on him. In this half mocking way he answers the Apostle. How many after him have acted in the same way and rejected the Grace, which stood ready to save.

And then that great heart of the Apostle Paul, filled with divine, yearning love, bursts forth in a prayer for the convicted King and the whole company. “**I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.**” What a memorable event! Paul before Agrippa and divine love pleading through the prisoner of the Lord.

III. The Verdict.

“**And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar**” (Verses 30-32).

The audience was over, for the King rose up and that was the signal of the breaking up of the company, never to meet thus again. The verdict of a private consultation is “**This Man doeth nothing worthy of death.**” Herod Agrippa said unto Festus “**This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.**” If Paul had not made his appeal to Caesar he might have then be freed. We have seen before that his appeal to Rome was according to the will of the Lord. To Rome then he goes. All is ordered by a gracious Lord.

~ end of chapter 26 ~

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