

## Acts 22:30- 26:32

Another giant portion of Acts to keep us on track to finish before Advent. Let me abridge Chapters 22v30 to 26v23.

Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and when he declared his Roman citizenship the commander showed him great respect. Paul is brought to the Sanhedrin for trial.

Seeing both Pharisees and Sadducees there he declares his belief in the resurrection of Jesus. The two sides began to argue as Sadducees don't believe in resurrection (that's why they're sad, you see!). The crowd became violent so Paul is taken back to prison.

His nephew learns of a conspiracy to kill Paul so the Governor transfers Paul to Caesarea. 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen are deployed and Paul is given horses to ride.

The Governor writes a letter to Felix to explain why Paul is transferred. Five days later a court is convened and Tertullus the lawyer sets out the charges: Paul is a troublemaker, stirring up riots, a ringleader of the Nazarenes and he tried to desecrate the temple.

Paul defends himself, admits to being a follower of The Way but also holds firm to everything Jewish. Interestingly, Felix "knew of The Way". He wanted Lysias (Commander of the Roman guard at Jerusalem) to decide so Paul is put under house arrest.

Felix met with Paul frequently, to give Paul opportunity to offer a bribe but when this didn't happen, he kept Paul in prison to appease the Jews.

Two years pass and Felix is succeeded by Festus. On a trip from Caesarea to Jerusalem, the chief priests and Jewish leaders asked Festus for Paul to be transferred to Jerusalem (so they could ambush him) but Festus said he was going to Caesarea and would see Paul there.

Back in Caesarea, Festus offered Paul a trial in Jerusalem but Paul appealed to Caesar.

Then King Agrippa and his wife Bernice arrive to pay their respects to the new governor. They ask to hear Paul. Entering court with great pomp and ceremony they listen, but Festus is confused as he has nothing to say to Caesar about Paul.

Paul retells his testimony - his opposition to followers of Christ; going to Damascus with authority to persecute; seeing a light; meeting Jesus; being opposed by Jews in the temple; finding God's help; testifying to great and small; retelling the words of prophets and Moses; bringing the message of light to the gentiles.

Now Read Acts 26:24-32

So, what do we make of this passage?

First, Paul is charged with being mad. That charge is also levelled at Jesus. In Alpha courses we're given the options that Jesus was mad, bad or the Son of God. Paul had already been charged with being bad (for desecrating the temple). And Paul is now firmly persuaded that Jesus is the Son of God.

We need to hold firm to our faith, even during these challenging times

Second, Paul compliments Festus and King Agrippa to the point that they think Paul is persuading them to follow The Way.

We need to compliment others - be kind to everyone we meet.

Third, that is Paul's greatest desire - that his hearers would choose Christ - to be the same as Paul, except without chains!

How much do we want those we share life with to be like us? Indeed, are we good examples of being followers of The Way?

Finally, Festus and Agrippa agreed that there was no reason for Paul to be imprisoned or executed but having appealed to Caesar, to Caesar he must go.

This is God's hand in getting Paul to Rome to spread the gospel.

Maybe there are times when we don't understand why things are working out in the ways that they do. Let us hold onto our trust and faith in God that he knows what we need and where we need to be.

During this current lockdown, maybe we can devote more time to getting closer to God. I admit to finding that a challenge but I want to see something positive come out of this time of separation from the world and the familiar.

Let's do this together!