

A Faithful Witness

Acts 25:1-26:32

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In the spring of 1961, the New York Yankees were kicking off one of their memorable seasons. Those were the days of Yogi Berra, Roger Maris, and Mickey Mantle. They were amazing baseball players. And, as always, the Yankees were loaded with talent. Early in that spring season, Maris and Mantle hit back-to-back home runs. It is reported that Yogi Berra made the famous quote after those home runs, "*It's déjà vu all over again.*"

Well, the quote, whether by Berra or someone else, is now infamous. *Déjà vu* is the word that describes the feeling of having lived through a present situation prior to that moment. Hence, Berra's funny comment after he witnessed back-to-back home runs by Maris and Mantle. Those guys often hit home runs.

When you read Acts 25 and Acts 26, you might say to yourself, "*It's déjà vu all over again.*" The Apostle Paul is on trial again, and it seems like we just had this experience and heard his story, didn't we?

Yes, we did, and this morning, we will go over it one more time. Now Paul is defending himself before the new Roman governor of Judea, Festus. Later Festus will invite Agrippa II and his wife Bernice to hear Paul. As we consider Paul's trials, we cannot help but be reminded that he was walking in the steps of the Lord Jesus. Through Paul's life, the Lord Jesus is teaching us *how to be His faithful witnesses*.

We are going to dig into some of the more challenging situations of what it means to be a faithful witness for Jesus. Our text addresses four situations where we should be prepared to be faithful witnesses. These situations are circumstances where we may struggle and even fail at times. Yet, Paul's example encourages us to be faithful witnesses for Jesus. Let's get look at these four situations.

1. Be a faithful witness when you are providentially hindered (Acts 24:27-25:5).

²⁷When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. ^{Acts 25:1} Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ² And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, ³ asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. ⁴ Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵ "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him."

When we read this text, we do not hear the name of the Lord or hear the Lord's plans but the Lord's fingerprints of providence are all over Paul's situation. Consider what is happening in this passage.

For two years, Felix had imprisoned Paul without any charges against him. He was being held in Herod's palace prison in Caesarea. Felix had made a political mess when he governed Judea. Now Rome was replacing him with Festus, a blue-blood Roman nobleman. Rome wanted someone to come in a cleanup his mess.

Festus comes in and starts all over with Paul, so it feels like, "*It's déjà vu all over again.*" He goes to Jerusalem to try to patch things up with the Jews. However, the very first thing the Jews want is for Paul to be brought to Jerusalem for trial so they could ambush him on the way there and kill him. Festus does not fall for it. He tells them if they want to make accusations against Paul, then they must go to Caesarea.

Meanwhile, Paul was still in prison. We know very little about Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea. We know he did not write a letter while he was in prison there. But what we do know—He didn't abandon his faith in Jesus. He did not get bitter or angry with God for leaving him as an uncondemned prisoner for two years. When he finally met Festus, he said to him Acts 25:8, 10-11,

Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense . . . To the Jews, I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹ If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death.

Paul was not afraid to die because he was holding to his faith in Jesus. He shows us how to be faithful when God has divinely obstructed our paths. We simply stay the course and keep holding to our faith in Christ.

As I mentioned earlier, God's activity is not mentioned in this text, but the fingerprints of providence are all over it, and here is where we see it. Remember Jesus had told Paul that he would go to Rome to be a witness for Him there, but he was not there yet. *Verse 12 tells us how Jesus got Paul to Rome.*

During his trial with Festus and the Jews in Caesarea, Paul concluded his case by saying:

But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” ¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar, you have appealed; to Caesar, you shall go.”

Brothers and sisters, when Jesus' divine plan has us in difficult circumstances, we are still called to be faithful witnesses for Him.

Just like Paul was faithful to Jesus for two long years during his Caesarea imprisonment, there will be times when we will endure hard providences of God in order for us to be witnesses where He places us. The situation may even feel like a prison, or it may be a real prison, but our calling in that season is to be faithful witnesses for our Savior.

Where has God placed you right now so that you feel stuck? It may even feel like a prison. Friend, call to Jesus. Hold fast to Him. Confess your faith in Him. Preach the gospel to yourself. Preach the gospel to others. Reach out to others for prayer and help. Remember that Jesus is in control even though it may not feel like He is in control.

2. Be a faithful witness when you are falsely accused (Acts 25:6-12)

In vv. 6-12, we heard the false accusations made against Paul. Yet, Paul, again, was a faithful witness for Jesus. Although the Jews falsely accused him, he did not get bitter and angry. He simply confessed he was innocent of the charges.

Theologian John Stott said that Festus was in a tight spot at this point. He wanted to set Paul free because he knew he was innocent, but he knew that he would offend the Jews if he did that. Also, he knew he could not convict an innocent man.

Then Paul gave him an out when he appealed to Caesar. Paul knew Jesus wanted him to go to Rome to be His witness. So, when he appealed to Caesar, Festus granted his request.

Although Paul may have been falsely accused by the Jews, their false accusations were not out of God's sovereign plan.

The Jews sinning against Paul was God's sending of Paul to Rome. Paul was walking in the steps of His Savior, who went to the cross because of the false accusations made against Him. *Sin and false accusations never thwart God's plan for His people to be His faithful witnesses.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there may be times in our lives when we will endure false accusations. There may be false accusations of something we have done or said. It may be in a court of law, at work, in our families, in our neighborhoods, or on social media, but these are occasions for us to be faithful witnesses for Jesus.

Remember, even false accusations are not out of God's sovereign control and plan. God works all things for the good of His people and His glory. *Remember, someone who sins against you may be your sending into a place where you can be a faithful witness for Christ.*

3. Be a faithful witness when everyone seems confused (Acts 25:13-27)

As Acts 25 concludes, there was still some political confusion. Paul may have appealed to Caesar and was going to Rome, but Festus still had a problem. He did not know what to charge to make against Paul. In order for Paul to stand before Caesar, he needed to charge him with some kind of crime, but he did not have one.

Luke tells us that not long after Festus had begun to govern Judea, Agrippa II and Bernice came to greet him. They basically congratulated him on his appointment as governor.

When Agrippa arrived, Festus began to tell him about Paul and the problem he had with him. He told him that he needed to send him to Caesar, but he had no charge to make against him, and he wanted him to help him come up with a charge.

Then Festus got to the heart of the issue when he explained his problem to Agrippa. Look in vv. 18-19:

When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed.¹⁹ Rather, they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.

Not only was Festus confused about Paul, but he was also confused about Jesus. He apparently had heard Paul's case, and Paul had told him about Jesus, but he was still confused. Festus had everything at his disposal. He had education, power, prestige, status, and money, but he was still confused.

The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, had every reason to be confused, but he was not confused. He was not confused because he was holding fast to Jesus, and Jesus was holding fast to him.

Friends, we are living in days where people are confused about many things. Today there are many who are confused about their gender. This is a major issue in our culture and society. Some are confused about their politics. They can't figure out who to trust and what needs to be done. Some are confused about the economy. They cannot determine if there will be a recession or depression and how to plan for the future. Some are confused about their personal finances. Just name any issue, and there is someone who is confused about it.

Listen, I do not want to minimize the experience of being confused. We all get confused at times. There are things I get confused about too. I don't know what the future holds. *However, here is what I do know. I know who holds the future, and His name is Jesus. I am not confused about that, and neither should you be.*

Bottom line: It is okay to be confused about some things, but it is not okay to be confused about who Jesus is. Jesus is the One person you do not want to be confused about in this world. God's word is clear about who Jesus is, what He came to do, and what our response to Him should be.

Jesus is the promised Son of God who came from heaven to save sinners from the penalty of their sin. He died on the cross for sin, and by our faith in Him and repentance in Him, we are saved. The question is: Have you trusted him? Have you turned from your sin and to Jesus?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we live in a confused world. This confused world is our opportunity to point people to the One who clears up the chaos of this world—Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the One who calls people out of darkness into His marvelous light. To be in His light is to leave the confusion of this world behind. Let's be faithful witnesses to a world that is in chaos and confusion.

4. Faithful witnesses boldly proclaim the gospel (Acts 26:1-32)

In Acts 26:1-32, Paul gives his testimony one more time. It is a bit different than in other places, but it is basically the same. He adds a few different details, but he follows the outline that we considered a couple of sermons ago. He talked about his life before Christ, how he was converted and how his life changed after he met Jesus.

So, here is what I want to do as we walk through Acts 26. I want to draw out some of the finer points of doing evangelism. These finer points will help us when we are witnessing in difficult situations.

Also, I want to say that Tony Merida's work on Acts 26 was very helpful for this part of the sermon. He did an excellent job of dissecting Paul's message. So, here are eight helps or tips to help us be faithful witnesses for Christ.

1) Be respectful to unbelievers (vv. 1-3)

Look in vv. 1-3:

So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: ² "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Notice how Paul was very respectful to those who listened to him. We must be *truthful and also tender* as we address those who listen to us. The gospel always confronts the worldview of others. There is no way to avoid the offense of the gospel so *how* we present the truth of the gospel is very important. If it is possible, think through *how* you will say what you will say to those to whom you are a faithful witness.

2) Own the sins of your past life (vv. 4-11).

In vv. 4-11, Paul didn't deny the actions of his past life. He talked about his work as a Pharisee and a persecutor of the church. Look in vv. 9-11:

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Our sins, much like Paul's, are pretty obvious to most people. There is little use in trying to pretend we were not sinners and even now are not sinners. The reason we came to Jesus was because of our great need to have our sins forgiven and to be made right with God.

In Paul's case, he thought it was his great effort at being righteous and religious works that made him right with God. However, his attempts at perfection failed. Not only that, his self-righteous-religious efforts led him to become a murderer and persecutor of the Lord Jesus. The very thing he thought was perfecting him and helping him please God was causing him to sin against God and others. Paul was blind.

Whatever or wherever you come from as a Christian, be honest with people about what your life was like before you came to Christ. You don't have to share the sordid details but being real about your sin and your great need for Jesus is relevant to those with whom you share the gospel. Bottom line: we all began as children of the devil and children of wrath, but by the grace of God—Jesus saved us.

3) Exalt Jesus in your conversion (vv. 12-17).

Remember as you share your story with others that Jesus' story is always more important than your story. It is Jesus who broke into your world and saved you. Make sure when you share the gospel with people that you make Jesus the Hero of your story.

4) Speak honestly about a person's need for Jesus (v. 18)

Verse 18 reminds us that we must warn people about their condition. Jesus commissioned Paul to take the gospel to those who are in darkness. He did not pull any punches when he spoke to the crowd about what Jesus had called him to do and what their condition was. He told them that he was called . . .

To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.

This may be hard for some people to hear, but it is important, to be honest with people about their condition without Christ.

The great Christian philosopher Francis Shaffer was once asked if he had one hour to share the gospel with someone, what would he tell them. He said that he would spend forty-five minutes telling them the bad news and fifteen minutes telling them the good news.

I am not sure that is the approach is the one you always want to take, but his point is well made. He wants us to see that it is really, really important that people understand their condition without Jesus.

5) What has your life been like since you met Jesus (vv. 19-22).

Here Paul explains how, after Jesus had called him from darkness to light that he became obedient to Christ. So, when we share with people how we came to faith, they also need to hear how we have changed since that time. What has our life been like since we met Jesus.

6) Boldly preach the gospel (vv. 22- 23)

In vv. 22-23, Paul gives us a brief definition of the person and work of Jesus:

So I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

This is a very brief explanation of the gospel. There had been some groundwork laid before gave this explanation of the gospel. For most people, it needs to be a fuller presentation, but for Paul's purposes here, there had already been much work already done, so he could give a shorter presentation.

7) Prepare for rejection (v. 24)

After we have shared the gospel, we hope people will confess their faith in Jesus. However, it is not uncommon for many people to reject Christ the first time they hear the gospel. When Festus heard the gospel, he told Paul that he was crazy. This may be the response people tell you.

Yet, even though people reject the gospel, we still preach, and we still call people to turn to Jesus. Our last point is in vv. 25-29.

8) Call for a response (vv. 25-29)

Even after Festus had called Paul crazy, Paul didn't let that phase him. He still called him to believe in Christ. Look in vv. 27-29:

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" ²⁹ And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

The Apostle Paul's ability and strength to be a faithful witness in hard situations didn't come out of the blue. He kept his eyes on the Lord Jesus, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross. He was filled with the

Holy Spirit, who gave him the strength to spend two years in a prison in Caesarea. Hebrews 12:1-2 teaches us how to be faithful witnesses for Christ.

Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.