



A Pulpit in the Prison

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God will be with us through our trials.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will point others to Christ in every trial.

LESSON TEXT ACTS 24–26

KEY PASSAGE ACTS 26:28–29

²⁸ Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

²⁹ 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.



TEACHING OUTLINE

ICEBREAKER: What do you think a typical workday looks like in the life of a pastor?

TEACHER TIP: Use the group's answers to point them to the ministry and story of Paul.

CONNECT: Share the Connect segment.

I. PAUL ON TRIAL

DISCUSS: *Where is the easiest place to share your testimony? Where is the most difficult place?*

- A. Charges Against Paul ☐
- B. Paul's Faith Even in a Heathen Court
- C. I will trust God, despite my circumstances.

DISCUSS: *Where in your life do you find it most difficult to trust God? How do you keep your faith strong in those tough times?*

II. FELIX, FESTUS, AGRIPPA

- A. Felix, Festus, and Agrippa as Secular Rulers
- B. Paul's Boldness to Testify Anywhere
- C. I will be bold to tell my story.

DISCUSS: *What's one way you can intentionally tell your story this week? With whom will you share your story?*

III. THE VERDICT

- A. No Fault in Paul
- B. Paul's Appeal to Testify Before Caesar
- C. I will point others to Christ through every trial. ☒

APPLY: Share the Apply segment.

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer for God to give us boldness to witness, even in our trials, and for God to open our spiritual eyes to see Him at work in every part of our lives.

CONNECT

JAXSON'S HOMELIFE HAD been filled with more stress than any child should have to endure. In the middle of that stressful and chaotic homelife, Jaxson went to a church service on a Friday night with his local youth group. Little did he know that this one service would set his life on a very different course. Jaxson had heard about God. In fact, when he was much younger, his mom had taken him to church every Sunday and Wednesday. Sadly, Jaxson's parents separated and his mom lost her faith in God. Church became an inconvenience and even a little uncomfortable, so they stopped going.

Jaxson remembered and held on to the memories of those services in the past. Then, when he was thirteen years old, he began attending a local church where he became involved with the youth group. He had finally found somewhere he could belong. He continued attending for several years but would never fully commit to the whole idea of church and God. He had so many questions that needed to be answered.

When Jaxson was sixteen years old, he went to a youth service with the group. After all, since he was part of the group, he went where the group went. In that service, Jaxson lifted his hands and fully surrendered to God. Oddly enough, it wasn't during the preaching or at the altar call, but during the worship service, God filled Jaxson with His Spirit. Jaxson would never be the same.

Suddenly things in his life no longer interested him. His desires began to rapidly change. He had been filled with the Holy Spirit, but something else happened in him that night. God was calling Jaxson to the ministry. He didn't fully understand what was happening to him. His old friends and the old crowd didn't have the same appeal. He was in pursuit of whatever God wanted him to do and become. Naturally, his friends instantly recognized this shift. They bombarded him with questions about what had happened to him. He was happy to tell his story and share what God had done for him, but it seemed the trial was only beginning.

The biggest party of the year was happening right next door to Jaxson's house. He had never been to a party like that before, and he was thrilled it was happening so close to home. He could easily sneak out and experience the party everyone would be talking about for the rest of the year. He would be part of the "in" crowd, if only he could go. It was settled; he was going to the party.

At nine o'clock he heard the music start. He began his plan to escape his house unheard. But he had not planned on something inside of him standing up and refusing to go to the party. He tried to fight it, but he had found something he wanted more than the party life. More than he wanted to please his friends, he wanted to please God. Jaxson soon learned that a trial doesn't always take place in a courtroom; sometimes it takes place in our hearts as we wrestle with the choice to live to please God or others.



LEARN

I. PAUL ON TRIAL

The apostle Paul was “that guy.” You know, the one who’s always sharing the gospel with everyone around him. You’re trying to grab lunch and he’s holding up the line trying to teach a Bible study to the person taking his order. Paul tended to invite trouble into his life every place he went, but not intentionally of course. He had an experience that changed his life forever, and he could not help but share what God had done for him. Some people in his day did not like the fact that Paul preached Jesus so strongly. They would have preferred if Paul had just gone away or perhaps was locked in prison where no one could see him or hear his testimony. As is true with us when we receive the Holy Spirit, something in us must testify to God’s wonder-working power. The apostle Paul always had a readiness to share his testimony. That readiness and willingness to testify of Jesus often landed Paul in prison or on trial.

DISCUSS: *Where is the easiest place to share your testimony? Where is the most difficult place?*

A. Charges Against Paul

Paul either caused a riot, held a revival, or served real prison time wherever he went. But even in prison, he still had revival. He saw prison doors opened and people converted even in the middle of his incarceration. In Acts 21, Paul had brought some Jewish men into the Temple because they were taking a solemn vow. However, around that same time, Paul was seen in the streets of Jerusalem with a Gentile man from Ephesus named Trophimus. Jewish law and the Roman authority were clear that Gentiles were forbidden from going far into the Temple.

DISPLAY IMAGE NOW

Between the Court of Gentiles and the Court of Jewish Women was a gate with this inscription: “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.” The Jews had created an unscalable, immovable wall to keep Gentiles out of the Temple. Since Paul was seen in the streets with a Gentile and later in the Temple, his enemies charged him with the capital crime of bringing a Gentile into the Temple.

Paul’s boldness of speech and zeal to bring Jews and Gentiles to Jesus landed him on trial in Acts 21–26. By the start of the trial, the Jewish leaders had filed two major charges against Paul: He taught to forsake Jewish law, and he brought a Gentile into the Temple. Paul denied the charges against him, but he readily accepted and confessed that he was guilty of this one: “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14). Paul admitted he was guilty of chasing after Jesus Christ and spreading the good news of His glorious gospel. His



detractors called it heresy, but Paul called it worship. Paul was no ordinary disciple because he knew the Law extremely well. His defense before Felix was flawless. Paul wasn't attempting to destroy Jewish laws or customs; he just understood that Jesus fulfilled them all.

B. Paul's Faith Even in a Heathen Court

The first authority to hear Paul's case was Governor Felix. Felix was unable to understand why the Jews hated Paul so much. He hoped Paul would bribe him for release, so he left him in prison for two years. Can you imagine? For two years the apostle Paul was imprisoned just to make the Jewish leaders happy or to make Felix some extra cash. That is mind-boggling, but Paul stayed faithful to God and never wavered. His testimony never changed in prison or while he was on trial. He kept trusting God even when the outlook was seemingly hopeless for him.

C. I will trust God, despite my circumstances.

It's easy to be faithful when everything in life goes our way. The challenge is to be faithful when nothing is going our way. Circumstances have a way of trying to shake our trust in God. Suddenly the echo of yesterday's sure testimony fades into the darkness of tomorrow's unsure future. What helped Paul hold on to the promises and hope God had given him? How could he go through all he went through and still not lose his faith and trust? The aged apostle likely looked back over his life and knew the God who kept him through the past trials would keep him through present trials. After all, He's the same God today as He was yesterday, and He will be the same faithful God tomorrow. (See Hebrews 13:8.)

DISCUSS: *Where in your life do you find it most difficult to trust God? How do you keep your faith strong in those tough times?*

II. FELIX, FESTUS, AGRIPPA

Imagine being on trial and being questioned not just by the judge but by the president of the country. Could anything be more intimidating? Felix and Festus, who were both governors in Judea, questioned Paul, and then Herod Agrippa, who was a king, questioned him. (Herod's grandfather was Herod the Great.) But the apostle never backed down. He seemed to have tremendous influence with every political figure he encountered. He never seemed intimidated that they held political offices; he seized every opportunity to share the testimony of the Lord with them.

A. Felix, Festus, and Agrippa as Secular Rulers

During the time Paul was imprisoned, Festus replaced Felix as governor over Judea. Festus had the same problem his predecessor had. Being secular rulers, Felix and Festus were lost concerning Jewish laws and customs. Festus was confused as to why anyone would argue over something so simple, but he knew he was limited in his understanding of the Jews. Desiring to understand the crimes Paul allegedly



committed, Festus arranged a trial with King Agrippa since he was well-versed in Jewish laws and customs.

B. Paul's Boldness to Testify Anywhere

No matter how high he had to go in the court system, whether to the governors or to the king, Paul was quick to point the way to Jesus. As he stood before King Agrippa, Paul readily admitted he was happy for the opportunity because he knew King Agrippa was an expert in Jewish customs and questions (Acts 26:2–3). If anyone would understand this case, King Agrippa would. Paul admitted to Agrippa that he had once walked the road his accusers were now walking. He had executed judgment, often capital judgment, upon Christians before his conversion, but he was a changed man now. He had a testimony of how God picked him up, opened his eyes, turned him around, forgave him, filled him, and gave him the greatest revelation that Jesus Christ is God incarnate.

C. I will be bold to tell my story.

You don't have to be in a courtroom to tell your story. You don't have to be on trial to share your powerful testimony of what Jesus has done for you. Tell your testimony to your family, friends, coworkers, classmates, neighbors, and even your enemies. Being bold doesn't mean being arrogant. The confidence we have does not come from our ability but from knowing Jesus has saved and delivered us. To be bold is to know we may experience opposition, but we press on anyway.

When sharing our story, Jesus Christ is the main character. That makes it easy to tell. We really aren't sure how He delivered us, but we know He has. We cannot explain everything about our experience, but like the young man who was healed of blindness, we can respond: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

DISCUSS: *What's one way you can intentionally tell your story this week? With whom will you share your story?*

III. THE VERDICT

As the apostle Paul stood before governors and kings, with his enemies chomping at the bit to see him sentenced and suffer, Paul never brought up the verdict. He did not question how it was all going to end. He just took time in the trial to testify again and again of Jesus Christ.

Does it ever seem as though you're waiting for the verdict to be handed down in your life, wondering how the current situation is going to unfold and ultimately end? What would happen if you intentionally focused on sharing your story with others, even while waiting for the verdict of your current situation to be handed down?

A. No Fault in Paul

After the Jews' lawyer flattered the judges and leveled his charges, after all the witnesses' testimony and the glaring lack of evidence to back up their testimony, it



was time for Governor Festus and King Agrippa to render their 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” (Acts 26:30–32). Felix, Festus, and finally King Agrippa had heard Paul’s case, and they all agreed Paul was innocent of the charges.

B. Paul’s Appeal to Testify Before Caesar

Earlier in the trial, when Governor Festus was hearing Paul’s case, the Jews asked for the proceedings to be moved to Jerusalem. Paul knew he would not receive a fair trial in Jerusalem, but he had another option for his case. Rather than be acquitted and released back on the streets into the waiting hands of angry men, Paul exercised one of the greatest privileges of any Roman citizen: He appealed his case to be heard by Caesar. The apostle saw an opportunity to witness to the highest authority in the known world. He was eager for an opportunity to preach Jesus to Caesar, just as he had preached Jesus to Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and everyone who would listen. Something in Paul was constantly looking for the next opportunity to share his testimony and the gospel with someone else. Jesus was always the focus of Paul’s life, no matter the opposition and no matter the trial.

C. I will point others to Christ through every trial.

It’s possible the gospel of Jesus Christ never would have been delivered to Felix, Festus, King Agrippa, and his sister Bernice if Paul had not been on trial for his faith. Could it be that sometimes the trial is not about us at all? Perhaps we are facing the trial of our lives so an opportunity arises to share our testimony. Our world may never hear it otherwise. Perhaps God is working something in each of our lives that we have yet to understand. Your trial might simply be an opportunity for a governor, king, or coworker who is watching your life to hear how you keep your faith in tough times. They’re waiting, watching, and listening for the testimony that is sure to come from your trial.

 **PLAY VIDEO NOW**



TEACHER OPTION: *Tell the story below, or share one of your own to illustrate the value of sharing our testimony in conventional and unconventional places.*

APPLY

OCTOBER IS THE month traditionally set aside to honor the clergy who serve week in and week out in our lives. There's no way we could put a price on the investment they make in our lives. Many of us are the product of a minister who wouldn't give up on us. Perhaps you're the one who wandered away, and the shepherd of the local church came looking for you. Many clergy members are bi-vocational, not by choice, but by necessity. They're often stretched thin, feeling as though they cannot truly be effective in any one area.

The heart of true ministry can be seen in the words of the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. "Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" (II Corinthians 12:14–15). That's as real as it gets. He wasn't after what they could offer him; he was after them. His one desire was to see every person receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. His passion was to share it with as many people as he could. He wasn't in ministry because it was easy. He wasn't in ministry because it afforded him great opportunities of grandeur. He was in ministry to see lives transformed.

"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" (Acts 26:28–29). The old saying goes something like, "Almost only counts in horseshoes." Agrippa was almost persuaded. Paul's witness and testimony of Jesus and the Resurrection almost persuaded this Jewish king to convert to Christianity. Don't discount the power of your incredible testimony.

Are you almost persuaded, or are you altogether persuaded? That's the question every one of us must ask ourselves. We can give the illusion that we are persuaded. We can probably all play the part well, but are we really persuaded? When we are really persuaded, our lives start to look a whole lot like Paul's. Trials become an opportunity to share what Jesus has done for us, to share our testimony. There is a pulpit in every prison waiting on us to step up and share what God has done. The opportunity lies before us all. Walk to that podium in your trial and share your testimony. Choose to have a front-row seat to the transforming power of the Holy Ghost as He works in the lives of others.

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e-newsletter to help create
daily disciples at home.



Healthy
Homes

