

47a ACTS

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening. This is the 10th of September, 2004. We are in Acts chapter 26.

We're starting to see the end of the book come up over the horizon and travel toward us. We take a moment at the outset to present ourselves before God's throne. It gives us a chance to remember the one with whom we have to do, and the purpose for our study, and the goal of our study.

And we get the chance to remind ourselves of those things as we spend a moment here in prayer. Father, we are grateful, as always, for another opportunity to refresh ourselves and be nourished and strengthened and comforted and encouraged through the study of your Word. We thank you for the fellowship of believers who share an enthusiasm and an appreciation for your Word and for the truth that is contained therein.

We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ, who cared for us before we were in existence, who saw us, who loved us, who came and gave his life on our behalf and even now sits at your right hand and intercedes for us, is preparing a place for us, and will soon return to enter us into the next phase of your plan and purpose for our lives. We pray that in this time of opportunity, this time of training, time of learning, time of preparation, that your Holy Spirit will minister the truth of your Word to our souls, help us to see our lives from a divine perspective. We pray that we can present ourselves as living sacrifices, that we can be renewed and can be thoroughly equipped for every good work, both now and in the kingdoms to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. As I said, we are in Acts chapter 26.

Paul is still, we've left him now for two weeks, standing in front of Agrippa and Festus and Bernice, making his defense. This is one of the fullest accounts of the preaching of Paul at this time. We have his letters to churches that he has written already during the second missionary journey in particular.

And yet, in detailing his conversion and his emphasis, this is one of the clearest places that you see the mind and the heart of the Apostle Paul. He basically is explaining to someone who is only glancingly familiar how he came to be an apostle and what he sees his mission as being and what the most important things about Christianity are as it emerges as a separate and distinct entity from Judaism. Agrippa, having a Jewish background, Bernice, his sister, having a Jewish background, he is going to address these remarks primarily to Agrippa.

He has already talked to Festus, and Festus is a Roman. But it's interesting because in this throne room, in this place where they are holding court, if you will, you have symbolically everything that summarizes the career of the Apostle Paul. You have the

Apostle standing there in chains.

And how many times does he represent himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ? And he is literally standing there shackled. You have a Jewish audience and a Roman audience, a Greek-speaking audience, not only sitting as the primary potentates, but all of their factotums and hangers-on and servants and lesser ministers. This is a room full of people as we are going to see tonight.

And there is a mixture. Agrippa, his domain is up to the north of Israel proper. Sometimes they call him the king of Lebanon because that's primarily his area.

But he is well acquainted. He shares a huge border with Israel. A lot of the people are the same.

Some of the territory is an overlap down into Israel. So he knows the score. He is not unacquainted with Judaism in particular and Christianity as it has emerged over the past few decades.

So this is a very pregnant moment, if you will, in terms of just the scene. And this is why Luke slows down in chapter 26 and gives us the most detailed of Paul's defenses. In other cases, we seem to get sort of a summary.

Here, Paul stretches out his hand and answers for himself. I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you. Notice he is talking to Agrippa.

This, again, sort of satisfies a little bit of Paul's angst or whatever you want to call it for the Jews. Because although he is called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he, as we know from Romans, has a very deep abiding love for his own people and desire to minister to them as well. And God has granted him opportunities to do that, both in the initial phase of his ministry and, once again, here.

Because there is a Jewish contingent. There are his detractors and his attackers and his accusers. There are the retinue.

And remember, Caesarea is in Israel. This is an Israelite town. And so lots of the hoi polloi who are in the room for one reason or another, whether they are ministers or bringing in jugs of water refreshments for the guests, they are hearing and they are listening and they are absorbing.

And so Paul has yet another chance. The chance that he didn't really get in Jerusalem, which is the Jewish capital of Israel, he is going to get in the Roman capital of Israel, Caesarea. And so this is really the fulfillment.

God is giving Paul the fulfillment of his desire in a way that Paul did not expect. Paul

thought he would be doing this in Jerusalem. He is going to end up doing it in Caesarea.

But he recognizes the moment. And when he raises his hand for silence and the room falls quiet, this is the fulfillment of a long-standing ambition for Paul to make his defense in front of a group of people. The other apostles have typically done this.

Here is his chance. I think myself happy. You can kind of see why.

This is not just a warm-up. It is not idle words. He is happy to be standing here at last addressing this mixed audience.

Before you, concerning all things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore, I beg you to hear me patiently. We have people today who are into genealogy, who like to go back and find their roots and see who did what and how many generations.

And I have mentioned before that in a way, if you go back more than your great-grandparents and you start counting how many people are at that level, two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, sixteen double greats, thirty-two triple greats, sixty-four at the four greats level. Sixty-four people. So one of those sixty-four people gave you your last name at the point of your birth.

And the other sixty-three of them are something else. And so I have been able to go back that far in my family history. And I think, well, it's interesting.

Here they are in Kentucky and Tennessee and they're traveling to Illinois and they come to Texas and one thing and another. But when I look at this, there are thirty-one other people at this level of my great-great-great-grandfather who were all living lives and doing things and had probably equally exciting stories. It's kind of a specious sort of a thing.

I mean, to do them justice, you've got to track all thirty-two of them down or all sixty-four of them down and not just pick one and say, well, this is the special one, this is the one I claim and the horse thief and the green grocer and these other people with unexciting or criminal lives, I don't want to know about them. I just want this one that came over on the Mayflower type of thing. Well, Agrippa, the reason I bring this up, in case you were wondering, Agrippa, historically, we know from history, had this thing about his Jewish heritage.

His whole family, the family of the Herods, kept sort of playing the Jewish card when it was to their advantage and then they would act like Romans when it wasn't so much to their advantage and they kind of straddled the fence. They weren't completely Jewish, but they were Jewish enough that when it was in their interest, they would investigate it and this was kind of a hobby with him is to be an expert on things related to the law, even though he wasn't technically 100% Jewish and, of course, it was an academic

pursuit. His sister is his consort, the Queen, Bernice, so it's not like he's trying to find the narrow way, but he's just interested.

So, Paul reflects this in his speech, you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Now, this is no small thing to say. By this time, with the inroads of Pharisaism and the oral law, the Mishnah Talmudic sort of accretions that glommed onto the Old Testament, to be an expert in all the manners and customs of the Jews, you pretty much need a six-foot shelf of encyclopedia to keep track of it all.

I mean, there's a lot. But Agrippa is kind of up on this. So, he says, Therefore, I beg you to hear me patiently.

Of course, all speakers that speak more than about seven minutes have to beg everybody to hear them patiently because our attention span is relatively short. My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first.

This was our lesson last time. We just springboarded out into Proginosco. They knew me before.

If they were willing to testify that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee. This would be the equivalent today of saying, if you look at the Protestant denominations, I was a Quaker. Have you seen this thing where they're going to put Amish people on television? I won't even go into that.

But the Roman Colosseum and the depths to which people will sink for entertainment's sake is beginning to arrive at a comparable level in my mind. The fear factor thing where you pack something's uncooked intestine with live bugs and someone has to eat it or they have to swim in the excrement of something. It's just ridiculous the humiliating and degrading things that they ask people to do and that people are willing to do for money.

It is a sort of pornography in my mind that is, because it's not naked bodies, it's some other sort of titillation. People look at it because they want to cringe or they want to get squeamish or they want to watch the reactions. It's the same thing with these dating shows, all of the quote-unquote reality television.

And of course, as with any other thing of this nature, it is never enough. You notice that they've got another one of these island, you know, get kicked off the island shows, I forget the name of it, but they've got another one but they say, you know, wilder, bigger, some other adjective meaning that the women are going to get naked or something. I mean, everything is bigger and bolder and brassier and more unthinkable.

Well, they have to keep upping the ante because after people see it a few times, it's old hat. It's no big deal for somebody to betray somebody else's alliance and kick them off the island or whatever, snuff out their torch. And so they have to get worse and worse

and worse.

And so now they have the family of a known criminal that's going to be on reality television. What does it do? Growing up gaudy or whatever it is, the John Gaudy offspring, you know, I don't know anything about that except that the fascination that people have with the strange and absurd is sinking to a newer and newer low. And how that relates to our lesson, I've sort of lost my own train of thought.

But the idea here that Paul says, people knew me before and I lived according to the strictest sect of the Pharisees. It was because of the Amish. That's how I got there.

This was the most conservative, the most difficult to maintain. There were the most rules, the most learning. It was the toughest.

This was the Marine Corps of Jewish sects in terms of difficulty and exclusivity and selectivity. You could be kicked out for any one of a number of things. It was hard to get in.

It was hard to stay in. It was hard to work your way through the ranks. And Paul was at the top of the heap.

He had the most famous Pharisee of the day as his mentor, Gamaliel. One would be real interested in knowing what Gamaliel thought as his star pupil rose to the top of the heap and was persecuting the Christians and then flipped, went with the enemy, so to speak. And yet Gamaliel himself was the one who said, you better be careful about persecuting Christianity.

You may be found to be fighting against God himself. And you get the idea he was pretty smart. And there's a reason why God orchestrated circumstances so that Saul would be the pupil of this great Old Testament scholar.

The greatest Old Testament scholar of the day was Gamaliel. And God saw to it that Saul, his future apostle, would be educated by the finest mind and probably one of the most devoted Old Testament saints of the day. I think we'll see Gamaliel.

I think we'll be able to ask him all kinds of questions. He'll publish a book in the Millennial Kingdom, My Pupil Saul, and we'll find out all the details. But he says, people knew this about me.

I was famous in those circles for my devotedness. This is no small thing to say. And even more than two decades later, he says, people here in this room, some of them can tell you if they are willing.

It's a matter of being willing. Now, in that regard, I want to once again digress briefly, and I'll apologize in advance. And although I try manfully to not engage in anything

political, I'm sort of going to engage in something political.

I guess it could be viewed as political. But it is an example of people looking at the past and reinterpreting it. You know, we have two candidates vying for the presidency.

There's a lot being said about their past, about their military exploits or lack thereof. And most recently, just in the last few days, the news media has been looking at President Bush's commanding officer during the time when he was in the Texas Air National Guard, and all of his military records were released, and they couldn't find enough traction in there to really hurt him. And so what they've done, his commanding officer, who was a colonel, died.

And so they're digging through this man's personal papers, trying to find any copies of memos or paperwork that he generated during his time as CO that could damage the president. And they found a couple of memos. This is just personal correspondence or memorandum for record.

And of course, the press says, look, we found a memorandum for record, and it's not in the president's record. What happened? How come it's not? I mean, it's mindless. A memorandum for record doesn't mean it goes in the guy's OQR.

It's not for his record. It's for record. It's not for his record.

I mean, it's just mindless. They say, look, it's a memo for record, and it's not in his record. Somebody pulled it.

Strings were pulled. Things were manipulated. And it's really ridiculous.

But to cut a long story a little bit shorter, let me read you an article. This is by Byron York. He writes for National Review.

And just in the interest of fact, I'm going to just read this to you in its entirety. What do you really know about George W. Bush's time in the Air National Guard? That he didn't show up for duty in Alabama? That he missed a physical? That his daddy got him in? News coverage of the president's years in the Guard has tended to focus on one brief portion of that time to the exclusion of virtually everything else. So just for the record, here in full is what Bush did.

The future president joined the Guard in May 1968. Almost immediately, he began an extended period of training, six weeks of basic training, 53 weeks of flight training, 21 weeks of fighter-interceptor training. That was 80 weeks to begin with, and there were other training periods thrown in as well.

It was full-time work. By the time it was over, Bush had served nearly two years. Not two years of weekends, two years.

After training, Bush kept flying, racking up hundreds of hours in F-102 jets. As he did, he accumulated points toward his National Guard service requirements. At the time, Guardsmen were required to accumulate a minimum of 50 points to meet their yearly obligation.

It's not that different in the Reserve today. According to records released earlier this year, Bush earned 253 points in his first year, May 1968 to May 1969. He's got a May-to-May annual record.

Bush earned 340 points in 1969 to 1970. He earned 137 points in 1970 to 1971. He earned 112 points in 1971 to 1972.

The numbers indicate that in his first four years, Bush not only showed up, he showed up a lot. Did you know that? That brings the story to May 1972, the time that has been the focus of so many news reports, when Bush, quote-unquote, deserted, according to anti-Bush filmmaker Michael Moore, or went, quote, AWOL, according to Terry McAuliffe, chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Bush asked for permission to go to Alabama to work on a Senate campaign.

His superior officers said okay. Requests like that were not unusual, says retired Colonel William Campenny, who flew with Bush in 1971. This is a quote from him.

In 1972, there was an enormous glut of pilots, Campenny says. The Vietnam War was winding down. If you were alive then, you remember that by '72, '73, we were in the process of pulling out.

The Air Force was putting pilots in desk jobs. In '72 or '73, if you were a pilot, active or guard, and you had an obligation and wanted to get out, no problem. In fact, you were helping them solve their problem.

So Bush stopped flying. From May '72 to May '73, he earned just 56 points. Not much, but enough to meet his requirement.

Then in '73, as Bush made plans to leave the Guard and go to Harvard Business School, he again started showing up frequently. In June and July of 1973, he accumulated 56 points, enough to meet the minimum requirement for the entire 1973-74 year. This is the year that's in question, by the way, and I'm talking now, but any of us that have been in the Reserve know that if you're trying to get a good year, you make sure you get your minimum points.

Well, in the first two months, he did a bunch of flying in June and July. He's got a May-to-May commitment, and so he got all 56 of his points in those first two months. Well, you can basically go the rest of the year and not drill, and you still have a good year.

The war is winding down, you're fixing to get out, etc. Now I'm back to the article. Then

at his request, he was given permission to go.

Bush received an honorable discharge after serving five years, four months, and five days of his original six-year commitment. By that time, however, he had accumulated enough points in each year to cover six years of service. During his service, Bush received high marks as a pilot.

They go on to quote from some of his fit reps. They all say he was an exceptionally fine young officer and pilot, a natural leader, clearly stands out as a top-notch fighter, interceptor pilot, etc. Of course, you know, if you don't screw up, everybody says you're walking on water.

So, anyway, as they are trying to make sure all of the records are out, that's an important point to note. If you're going to focus just on that last six months, well, gee, he didn't show up to fly. Well, he didn't have to show up to fly.

He already had all of his points. He did miss his physical, but his request to get out was already in. So, anyway, I give this for two reasons.

For one, I don't think we get enough balanced reporting. Secondly, it is an example of how two different groups can look at the same history and present it in entirely different lights. You can do the same thing with Senator Kerry and his four months in Vietnam.

You talk to some swifties and they say one thing. You talk to a few others and they say something else. I'm not going to get into that whole deal.

Except to say that, a lot of times, merit or lack thereof is in the eye of the beholder. And a lot of people on both sides of Senator Kerry's history are looking back with sort of a political lens. It's real hard to know exactly what.

But what he has on the record should be sufficient for people to look at. The things that he said after he came back, the accusations that he made that nobody has been able to substantiate, that many have come out and refuted, speak for themselves. But my point is, here is Paul standing before Agrippa, representing his early life in Jerusalem, when he was a different guy, before he had a radical life change.

Lots of people can bring up stuff from your past, especially before you got saved or before you really woke up to the plan and purpose of God and began to live according to the light of the word. And they can put a real bad light on things. And there may be some grist there.

There may be some actual truth there. A lot of us have stuff in our past, some more than others, that we would just prefer stayed back there. Heaven forbid you get in some public eye and they start digging around and trying to root up and talking to everybody you ever knew.

What happened back in this year and that year? And what about this? And why did this strange thing happen? Very few people could stand that kind of scrutiny. Very few. But the Apostle Paul does the opposite.

He says, look, I'm going to tell you what I was doing. I was well known. And some of these people can tell you.

My manner of life from my youth all the Jews know. Now that's quite a statement to make. He was notorious.

He's been in the press. They knew me from the first if they were willing to testify that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee and now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. What is he talking about here? What is the hope of the promise made to the fathers? The big R. How many people want to go to the Old Testament? If you read in the scholarly world you find all of these great gray-headed commentators who go back and say, oh, that's a later edition.

They didn't know anything about the afterlife until they went to Babylon, etc., etc. Paul the Apostle was a whole lot closer to the time than any of these pontificators today. And he says, you know what? The hope of the fathers, which nobody argues with standing in the room, is resurrection.

The hope of the promise of God is resurrection. And everybody acquiesces. Nobody stands up except the Sadducees.

And the Sadducees, that was their claim to fame. Oh, we throw over the promise of the fathers. We think we're smarter than the fathers and there is no resurrection.

And everybody else just poo-pooed the Sadducees because, well, what's the matter with you? You know, it's kind of like people who say Jesus was not really the Son of God. He was just a kindly rabbi and everything's been blown up and we look at them with pity. You know, it's a shame that you're not any smarter than that.

And that's how they used to look at the Sadducees. Well, the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers, to this promise, our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. He doesn't say our Pharisaic sect, does he? He says our twelve tribes.

Twelve tribes. That's the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. He doesn't say all of us in Judea, all of us who came back with Ezra and Nehemiah.

He says the twelve tribes. Now, when's the last time they had the twelve tribes? Way back. I can't tell you what a huge piece of evidence this is that gets completely ignored by people today who say you won't find resurrection in the Old Testament.

Great God in heaven. Read Daniel, read Ezekiel, read Job, read Acts chapter 26. Paul bases his life and death defense before Agrippa and a crowd of Jews on the hope of the promise of God, which is resurrection.

And he says this is the kingpin, this is the focal point, this is the axis about which faith in Jesus Christ turns. This is the single truth about Christianity that he raises in this context is the resurrection. It's the first and foremost.

Not the crucifixion, not the burial, the resurrection. Why? Well, it's like when we talk about faith, hope, and love. You have death, burial, and resurrection.

Well, the greatest of these is love because you can't get to love unless you have already gotten the faith and the hope figured out, right? You don't get to resurrection unless you've gotten to the death and burial. So once you establish the truth of resurrection, well, the death and burial just fall right in the line. Same thing with love.

The greatest of these is love because if you arrive at that, you've got faith and hope nailed. You can't get to love without figuring out faith. Faith is the means, hope is the motivation, and love is the outworking and the daily practice of the Christian faith and hope.

And in the same way, the resurrection, and the reason I sort of am flailing this a little bit is because if you think back over the last 30 days of existence, think about work and home and meals and sleep and driving and all of the stuff that we do, how many times has resurrection crossed our mind? We are Christians. We are Bible-believing, Bible-studying, narrow-way-seeking Christians. But how many times has resurrection actually crossed our mind? It's an important question to ask because Paul says this is the thing.

This is what it's all about is resurrection. I think you can honestly say we have thought about it because we together have looked at why we are here. We have prayed about being prepared for the next life.

We know that the obstacles that we encounter and the principles of the Word of God that we learn and that we seek to apply are not just to get us through the Sunday through Saturday work week and home week and just the daily travails. We're looking ahead. We're trying to have a little higher perspective, a broader scope, recognizing that we've got a much longer life to live in the Millennial Kingdom and beyond than we do here.

And so I feel like we probably have had this cross our minds, but it should. It ought to. It's a part of a healthy Christian life to consider the resurrection.

It's a great perspective to maintain because all of us get attacked. All of us get challenged. All of us hit adversity.

There are certain things that actually stimulate your fight or flight reflex. I've had this

happen to me just this past week. Some things, I think about them, and they just make my heart beat faster and I get in that fight mode.

I want to go tell somebody off. I want to straighten things out, show them how the cow ate the cabbage. I never figured out where that came from, how the cow ate the cabbage.

But you want to go make the chips fly somewhere. You want to straighten some stuff out. And how do we cope with that visceral reaction to bad things? Well, one thing is to ask ourselves the question, now how is this going to look when I'm in the resurrection and I look back on it? How important is it going to be from that standpoint? It seems big now and it's filling my entire windshield, but in the resurrection, is this really going to make a difference? What about this is going to make a difference in the resurrection is my response.

Have I learned self-control? Have I learned patience? I was telling Patty earlier, a lot of times it reminds me of David who was unjustly hounded with legal authority by the King of Israel with armies and groups were sent to slay him. Javelins were slung at him when he was trying to minister and trying to be a help by his own father-in-law, family. Egregious wrongs were done to him.

But when he had the chance to get back at Saul as he lay sleeping in the middle of the night, he grabbed his water bag, grabbed his spear, went over and stood up on the ridge, yelled down into the valley, O King, may the Lord judge between me and thee. Your life was in my power and I did not take it because you are the Lord's anointed. God will judge between you and me.

That is a resurrection perspective. David could do that because David knew that he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And he would not have that blot on his record that he forestalled the plan of God, that he jumped the gun, that he did something out of convenience or out of opportunity that principle and truth of God clearly dictates is not right.

If God anoints a man and God puts him somewhere, let God take him out. If someone occupies a position, if someone has some leverage, God put them there. Let God take them out.

We don't have to take that into our hands. But that's a resurrection perspective. That's a kingdom perspective.

People are always talking about kingdom this and kingdom that. Kingdom thinking is resurrection thinking. What is it going to matter in the resurrection? What is the issue here? Is it getting this problem resolved and sticking this person back in their place? Or is it, is God pleased when he looks at me? Is my behavior something God can bless? This

is the question I ask myself almost every day.

Something will come up and I have a course of action and this one seems really satisfying and I'm considering this one. And I ask myself, well, which of these can God bless? If I do this, can God bless it? It's a real quick test. Because if I do this and I say, can God bless it? I know instantly, God's not going to bless that.

God's not going to look at that and say, good job, well done, good and faithful servant. Let me just put some blessing on that. I know good and well he's not going to bless that.

I may not be able to find chapter and verse in the word of God, but I just know God's going to look at it and he's going to win. There's going to be no cheering in heaven over that one. We have to think in terms of the resurrection.

There is a much bigger world than what we have. This is why Paul makes this point. Acts chapter 26.

If you don't remember anything else about Paul in front of Agrippa, remember, I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. Guess what? You and I can make this very same statement. We stand and we will be judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.

The hope of the promise that is in this Bible. To this promise, our twelve tribes earnestly serving God night and day hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? And yet, many times our practice betrays that we're not really expecting a resurrection. We're not really expecting a future based on what we did here. That our standing and our opportunities and our rewards and our service and the scope of our service and the extent to which we reflect God's glory is going to be based on the decisions we're making right now.

The thoughts and intents of our heart right now. The way we cope with adversities and pressures right now. It's all about the resurrection.

It's all about the future. We are taking the test and the results are going to be in and the standings are going to be assigned and the slots are going to be filled in the future all based on how we cope now. How often does the resurrection cross our mind? Would I be standing in front of the Supreme Court and say, I live my life the way I do because of the hope of the resurrection? That's why I do what I do.

That's why I am who I am. That's why people who knew me before see such a change. It's the hope of the resurrection.

Turn over with me to 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians 1, 2, We give thanks to God

always for you, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. Is that not everything we've been talking about in the last couple of weeks? Knowing your election by God, for our gospel does not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.

You know what kind of men we were among you for your sake, and you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out so that we do not need to say anything.

Paul says, We go to a town, and they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. What a testimony. These people live in such a way that surrounding regions, surrounding communities, people outside Macedonia and Achaia say, Have you heard what's going on down there in Thessalonica? There's a group of people down there, and that apostle Paul came in and told them about Jesus Christ, and they've given up idol worship.

They don't go down to the temple anymore. They pray. They're fair dealing.

We go down there in caravans, and we engage in trade with them, and we get a square deal. They don't jip us. They don't do the sleight of hand.

We don't dig down into the sack of grain and find rocks. You can go down to Thessalonica and get a square deal. They deal with integrity, and I ask them why.

I say, How come you're not acting the way you used to? And they say, Well, I'm expecting God. I'm expecting to be resurrected. I'm expecting Jesus Christ from heaven, and I'm going to stand before him, and I don't want this on my record.

I don't want this on my conscience. He says, They themselves declare concerning you. These are people that Paul goes to, fixin' to evangelize, and they say, Well, we've heard of you, and we've heard of what happened in the communities where you've preached.

Why, down there in the Thessalonians, you've turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven. What a testimony. Those people down there are waiting for Jesus to come back because they think they're going to be resurrected.

That's the hope. That is the testimony that we ought to have. We ought to look different.

We ought to have a hope that is visible. We ought to have a love that is motivated by that hope. We ought to have a faith that fuels that hope and that love that makes us different.

We don't stand out because we dress funny or put a fish on our car. We stand out because of the hope of the resurrection. It's an exceedingly important concept, and that's the reason Paul brings it up here in Acts 26 in front of Agrippa.

Many other passages we could go to. We could go over to Corinthians where he talks about the fact that if Christ is not raised and the dead are not raised, then if we only have hope in this life, and that's what most Christians have. If you look around, in our brotherhood of Christ today, most Christians are hoping in this life, how can I have a better life in whatever area? Name the area.

There's a Christian book that will tell you how to have it through the Bible. Pray the prayer of Jabez. Think about angels.

Do this, that, and the other. Follow these steps, and here's your happy life. How many of these books say, here's the way to make it in the resurrection.

Here's the way to be prepared for service in the millennial kingdom. You go down the Christian book aisles and see if you can find a book that talks about where you will be and how well prepared you will be in the resurrection. It's all in this life.

Paul says in Corinthians, if your hope is only in this life, we are of all men most miserable because we've lost the central axle about which that wheel is supposed to turn, which is the hope of the resurrection. Well, that's why Paul brings this up and he hammers it. Look how many times he mentions the resurrection here.

I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. This promise our twelve tribes earnestly serving God night and day hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am also accused by the Jews.

Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? I thought I myself must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. I did this in Jerusalem. Many of the saints I shot up in prison, etc.

Persecuted them to foreign cities. He's going to tell the story of his conversion. And then in verse 19, Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

I declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea and then to the Gentiles that they should change their minds, turn to God, and do the works befitting change of mind. This is why the Jews seized me and tried to kill me in the temple. Having obtained help from God, to this day I stand witnessing both to small and great saying no other thing than those which the prophets and Moses said would

come.

The Christ would suffer. He would be the first to rise from the dead and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. That's the gospel in a nutshell.

It is the light of the risen Christ. He is the first to rise from the dead. He desires to stand as the firstborn among many brethren in the resurrection.

And that's what we ought to be looking at and looking forward to. Well, it's a powerful message. We're going to visit that intermediate part that we skipped, the account of his conversion, when we come back from the break.