

48b ACTS

Let's resume our study now of Acts chapter 26 by way of John 6 and miscellaneous other passages that we feel like looking at. I am intrigued by the idea of eternal life in its quality and the opportunity to be raised up. When you look at passages in the Word of God where our word is used, you find that when it is specifically referring to and emphasizing our actual resurrection, it is included in the context, resurrection out from the dead, ek nekros, and that sort of thing.

It is very clear that it is looking at the bodily, physical resurrection of Christ or our future resurrection, resurrection of the saints, etc. So, for example, in Ephesians chapter 5, there are just innumerable passages. I wish we had time to take a 3 or 4 week study and just go through and look at all of the places where the Bible talks about being raised up with this dual emphasis not only on just being raised from the dead, but the opportunity to be elevated.

But take a look at Ephesians chapter 5. The focus of our investigation here is going to be verse 14. Therefore, he says, Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Now, just looking at that verse in isolation, what category would you place this passage in? Physical resurrection, right? Well, let's take a look at the context.

Go back to the beginning of Ephesians chapter 5 and take a look at what Paul is emphasizing here to the Laodicean church. You remember that this is the Laodicean letter, of course. What's he talking about? Paul, in his letters, just as a reminder and as an overview, he gives the doctrine in the first part and he gives the application in the latter part.

He teaches you the principles and then he says, Therefore, act this way, live this way. Here's what these things mean. I've taught you some mysteries of the truth of God.

Here's what it ought to produce in you. Well, in chapter 5 of Ephesians, which has six chapters, he is in that application phase. You read Ephesians chapter 1, great theological truth, I pray that you may come to know.

And then he gives the hopes and Christ is the head of the church and you once walked in darkness and now you're enemies of God. And now you've been reconciled, you've been brought in, you've been sealed with the Holy Spirit. He gives you all of these great truths in the first part of the book.

Now, beginning in chapter 4, he says, I therefore beseech you to walk worthy of the calling. And he goes through chapter 4 in that light. Put away lying, he says in 4:25.

Let him who stole steal no more in 4:28. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit in verse 30. Let bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you in 4:31 with all

malice.

Verse 32, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgive one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Just as God in Christ forgave you. He covered that earlier in the book and he says, what does it mean? If God forgave you in Christ Jesus, you in Christ Jesus ought to forgive each other.

Don't bear a grudge, bury the hatchet. Now, chapter 5, therefore, therefore, your first three chapters, be imitators of God like beloved children. A beloved child is going to emulate their parents, the good things.

Walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us. As an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma. Christ, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He has been raised up, not only from the grave, but he has been raised up from the earth. He is at the highest position in the universe, the right hand of the Father. As Christ has been raised, Paul says, you be raised.

You walk in love as Christ loved us. Fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for sanctified ones, for separated ones. Filthiness, foolish talking, coarse jesting are not fitting.

Rather, thanksgiving. This you know, no fornicator, no unclean person, no covetous man who is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Doesn't that resonate with what we have studied? People who persist in these practices, these present tenses, patterns of life as believers, will not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, will not have an inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Thousand year millennial kingdom, no privileges, no property rights, no entrance rights into Palestine, into Israel, into Jerusalem. You're going to be in Timbuktu chopping coconuts out of a tree or something. I don't even know if they grow coconuts in Timbuktu.

I don't know what happens in Timbuktu. I hope I never find out. Maybe you can send me a postcard there in the millennium, but right now, I don't know what happens there.

This you know, fornication, uncleanness, coveting, you do that here, you have nothing there. Right? So what are we talking about now? We're looking ahead for believers. How you act now is going to determine what happens in the future.

Look at verse 6. Let no one deceive you with empty words. The vast seas of believers and Christians in our age have been deceived with empty words. We have been given false information.

We have been given, as they used to say when I was a midshipman, bad gouge. We've gotten the wrong scoop. It's useless information.

It doesn't pertain. It doesn't inform. It doesn't prepare us for the future.

This prepares us for the future. We need to find covetousness in our life and get rid of it, or we're sacrificing permanent possessions in the kingdom of Christ and kingdom of God. That's something I can work on every single day.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Another way of saying this is, God's wrath comes on His disobedient children because of these empty words, because of these consistent bad practices. It sounds like, well, sons of disobedience.

That's probably those who are disobedient to the gospel. They're unbelievers and going to hell. These are disobedient sons.

Instead of being sons of God, we're sons of disobedience. We're still sons, but we're disobedient. And God's wrath will come, and God's wrath will be manifested at the judgment, and it will be evident in our status and our opportunities and our possessions in the kingdom of Christ and in the kingdom of God.

Therefore, do not be partakers with them. Partakers is a pregnant word for us, isn't it? Meros, partake of the inheritance. Christ is the firstborn among many brethren.

It is God's goal for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose to stand with Christ as inheritors. Do you want to be a partaker with Christ, or do you want to be a partaker with the sons of disobedience? Do you want to be raised up and be in the profitable column, or do you want to be cast out and be in the lost column? That's what our life is about. That's what Christianity is, is deciding this day whom we will serve.

Will we in our house serve the Lord, or are we going to serve our emotions? Are we going to serve our appetites? Are we going to covet? Are we going to engage in vain words and so on? Look at verse 8. For you once were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. You were darkness.

You are light. That is positional truth. That is salvation at the point of faith in Christ.

Now that you have been given this potential and given this opportunity, now you have an imperative. He doesn't say become light in the Lord. He says you are light in the Lord.

Act like it. Walk like it. Walk as children of light.

For the fruit of the Spirit is in goodness, righteousness, and truth. The fruit of the Theopneustos word is in righteousness. It's in goodness.

It's in truth. That's a real good set of criteria to apply to conversational topics, isn't it? How many times do people try to drag us into gossip and maligning and judging? I'm not talking about any of our conversations, but when you're mingling out in the world, when you're in the workplace, or you're in public arenas and people are talking, and you have glancing acquaintance, and all of a sudden, oh, whoever's not there is the subject of conversation. And it isn't, isn't she a wonderful mother? And isn't she a wonderful wife? And isn't she a wonderful this, that, and the other? It's, did you see what she had on? I would be caught dead in that.

I mean, this type of thing. This is all theoretical. I haven't actually heard any such thing, of course.

Walk as children of light. The fruit of the Spirit is in goodness, righteousness, and truth. If the conversation doesn't have some element, some glancing connection to goodness and righteousness and truth, why are we talking about it? It's vain and empty words.

I sent an email to a guy who was trying to dredge up a 50-year-old controversy having to do with racism and segregation and one thing and another. And I said, basically, I don't want to get into this with you. Look in Timothy.

Look in Romans, where Paul says, Avoid vain disputations. Avoid wrangling about words which do not edify and do not build up. He says, don't waste your time.

The time is short. Redeem the time. Don't waste it.

Any rank unbeliever can chew on a juicy piece of gristle that is gossip about someone. It has no nourishment. It has no benefit.

It isn't any good. It's just like a dog gnawing an old dead bone. It's just pastime.

So that's what Paul is talking about here. The fruit of the Spirit is in goodness, righteousness, and truth. Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

If Jesus joined the conversation, would it change? You know how it is when the preacher walks in. Even the lowliest sort of pastor that I am, conversations change sometimes when I walk in because people know that I minister the Word of God. And so, you'll see two people kind of look over and they stop talking and you think, Hmm, I wonder what that was about.

Well, how much more so if the Lord Jesus came? You know, they say that what we were talking about would not be acceptable to a pastor. Well, find out what is acceptable to the Lord. If the Lord joined.

If the Lord was there. If the Lord is looking over your shoulder. If the Lord is listening.

I love the plaque that my mom had on the wall that said, Christ is the head of this house.

The unseen guest at every meal. Silent listener to every conversation.

You still have to find that for me. Have no fellowship, verse 11, with unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. It is legitimate to expose works of darkness.

Do not become sinful. Do not become angry. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

But at the same time, you do not sit there and act like there is no alligator in the room when there is. When in our periphery, something rears an ugly head, an evil head, it has to be exposed. You say, that is just not right.

I cannot countenance that. I can't remain silent in the presence of this. I have to speak.

Do not participate in unfruitful works of darkness. Don't have fellowship with it. Expose it.

It is shameful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. Well, you can make up your own illustrations for that. All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

Therefore, he says, Awake, you who sleep. Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light. Now, which category would you put Ephesians 5.14 in? Physical resurrection or being raised up? Awake, O sleeper from the dead.

Come out of your dead culture. Come out of your dead habits. Come out of your works of death.

And, bear fruit in keeping with change of mind. Context is everything, isn't it? It really makes a difference to read the first 13 verses. Awake, you who sleep.

Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light. Notice in verse 14, Therefore, he says, Is this a quote? Is there an Old Testament verse somewhere? Awake, you who sleep. Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.

Does that sound like an Old Testament passage? Why does it say, Therefore, he says? Well, people say, it sounds a little bit like Isaiah 60 verse 1. It sounds a little bit like Isaiah 9.2 or 26.19 or one of these other things that talk about rising or light or whatever. Paul, in this case, you know how sometimes he says, I'm going to tell you something, not I but the Lord. I'm going to tell you something, not the Lord but me.

Well, this is one of those, I'm going to tell you something, not I but the Lord. He says, Awake, O sleeper. Arise from the dead.

Christ will give you light. You're not going to find it in the Old Testament. Paul says, This is why God says this to us.

His whole chapter here has been about light and life, righteousness and truth, and living in the light of the Word. Awake from the dead. We are believers.

We are sons. But we can be sons of disobedience. It's all in whether or not we look at being raised up.

Well, that's just one use. By the way, when it says, Arise from the dead, that's on istami. And it even has from the dead in the context, but I will tell you, this passage belongs in the spiritual life, partake of the inheritance category.

So, you know, it's not a computer program where you just put in a rule and it's going to tell you, it's this, it's that, it's this, it's that. We have to read with understanding. You will find back in Acts chapter 9, in verse 11, the Lord said to Saul when He struck him down on the road to Damascus, Get up and go to the street called Straight.

Get up and go. We have to just put it on our refrigerator, shouldn't we? Get up and go to Straight Street. We have to remind ourselves every day.

Get up. Raise up. On istami.

Rise up. Walk the narrow road. That's basically the symbolic instruction that Jesus Christ gives the future Apostle Paul.

He's still Saul in the dust of the Damascus road. He says, Stand up. Go to the Straight Street.

Which is exactly what he does, both literally and spiritually. Inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul he is praying. Actually, that's when he's talking to Ananias.

But Jesus says the same thing to Paul on the road. Peter, when he gets his vision about the sheet being let down, remember three times? Arise, Peter. Kill and eat.

On istami. And Peter is not dead. He says, Stand up.

Operate in the light of a new truth that you have not known before. Let me just give you a couple of other places where you will find this word being used. Our good passage there in John 6, of course, that's all on istami.

Acts 2.24 God raised him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for him to be held in its power. There you have a classic on istami in the sense of physical resurrection. God raised Christ from the dead.

He's the firstborn out from death. Acts 2.30 Because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, God promises David that there is a word play there on resurrection. So, we have to read with

understanding.

We have to read with a sensitive eye. What does it mean to be raised up? So now, let's go back to our passage in Acts 26 and let's take a fresh look at what Paul is saying as he stands before Agrippa, as he stands before Festus. I am now, verse 6, standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers, the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve God night and day.

Now, think about that. When we were looking at this just in terms of the physical resurrection, it kind of sounds like salvation by works, doesn't it? Our twelve tribes have been working night and day hoping to attain to this resurrection. Do we work our way to salvation? Is it salvation by our efforts? Paul says, I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.

What does it say over in Hebrews chapter 11 about those who dwelt in tents waiting for a city whose founder and builder is God? They were looking for reward, for possession, for inheritance. Even in the Old Testament days, it wasn't just, will I rise and live again? How will I live? Am I rising just to live in a tent for another thousand years? No. God is going to build me a city.

I'll live in a tent now because there is a city coming. God builds the city. God founds the city.

That is a city on a solid foundation. I'm not going to try to build my own. I will take possession of the one that God builds.

Paul says, I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve God night and day. We are looking forward to a future that doesn't just consist of existence, but of promise, of possession, of potential.

Why is it considered incredible among you if God does raise the dead? I thought to myself, I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This is just what I did in Jerusalem. I locked up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests.

But also, when they were being put to death, I cast my vote against them. I'm sure that is something that weighed heavily in Paul's conscience throughout his life. As I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme.

And being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. While so engaged, as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, this is now going to be the third telling. We had the original story in Acts chapter 9. He told this before Felix in Acts chapter 22.

And now he is going to tell it in front of Agrippa and Festus. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.

That last part, why are you persecuting me, is common to all three accounts. Kicking against the goads is not in Acts chapter 9. It's not in Acts chapter 22. It is only here.

What does it mean? In the old King James it said, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. It reminded me of being out in Barstow and having those prickly pear cactus. You try to ride your bike too close to the edge of somebody's driveway and you kick the pricks.

And boy, I mean, you remember it for a long time. And why does Jesus say this? Because it doesn't match the first two accounts, some manuscripts tried to leave it out and so the manuscript evidence is split, but I believe it's original. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.

This was a proverb in the Greek world that had to do with you have an ox, he's harnessed to a plow or a wagon or something, and he's refusing to go in the direction that he's supposed to. And so you take the goads, you take the whip, and you're trying to goad the ox into going forward. And what does he do? Instead of going forward, he just kicks.

Well, when he kicks against the goads, all he's doing is injuring himself. Nobody benefits. The ox doesn't benefit because he's just going to get another application of the goads.

The owner doesn't benefit because the ox is not moving forward doing what he's supposed to do. It's futility. It is futile, not in the sense that you cannot resist the goads.

Now, the ox can sit there until he's whipped to death. And some people say, Calvinists and Reformed theology, well, you know, it's futile for you to kick against the prodding of God. You're going to have to give in because irresistible grace is going to get you.

It's not what it means. He says, look, don't you find it a waste of time? God is prodding. What this tells us is, God had been dealing with Saul long before the Damascus Road.

The Word of God and the Spirit of God had been working a conviction on him for a long time. And he just, instead of responding to it, he was resisting it. Why do you always resist the Holy Spirit? Remember that? He was resistant.

He was brooking. He had a weight of tradition. He had a status.

He had a standing. He was a pupil of Gamaliel. He was a big time Pharisee.

Hebrew of the Hebrews, etc. And he had not yet reached the place where he could look at all that and consign it to the dung heap. It meant a lot to him.

And he, kind of like the rich young ruler, he had a lot to lose if he gave in to this more and more convincing evidence that there really was something to this Christian faith and this Christian doctrine and the facts about Jesus Christ. Paul knows them well. He has tried to convince these people to blaspheme.

What do you think he was trying to convince them for? Because they were telling him, no, I believe the Lord Jesus is the Son of God. I believe He rose again the third day and ascended to heaven. And I am walking in His way.

He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Him. And Paul says, no, I want you to renounce Him.

I want you to say something different. And these people, as they died, as they were imprisoned, as they lost all their worldly possessions, God was using their testimony in ways they could never know to be a goad, to prick the conscience, to be a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Because Paul doesn't have the mysteries of the Church Age doctrines yet, does he? What does God the Holy Spirit use? He uses the weight of the Old Testament and the testimony of these people.

And their peace as they are persecuted, their peace as they are imprisoned, their peace as they are pressured is a goad. And Jesus says, don't you find it hard to kick against these goads? Now, here's the main point. If you haven't heard anything else about the goads, listen to this.

If you have a goad, what is it? It's a wooden handle, leather straps, and some sharp things on the end, right? This is how you make your animals move. Now, you've got one of these, and you're walking down the road. Are you just going to walk up to any old ox and whip it? Does that accomplish any useful purpose? You know, Tommy Smothers used to tell a story about John Henry and about how he was going to try to race the steam drill, and John Henry, you know, spit on his hands, and then he spit on the hammer, and then he spit on the steam drill, and then he spit on the cat, and then he started spitting on everything, you know, for no good reason.

Well, here's the point about a goad. If you are being goaded as an ox, who's doing the goading? The owner of the ox goads his own ox. You belong to the man with the goad.

He doesn't say, it is hard for you to pull against the rope because I'm trying to buy you as an ox, I'm trying to purchase you out of the ox market, and I'm pulling with the rope, and you're resisting. Do you see the point here? Saul belongs to God. God is goading his own ox.

And he says, why are you resisting me? You belong to me. I'm using the goad on you.

Why do you not go? You're kicking against the goads.

Well, people don't goad other people's oxes. You goad your own ox. And if he's being goaded, who's he being goaded by? He's being goaded by his master.

He is already a believer. He's an Old Testament saint. God is prodding him and pricking him and pushing him with the light of Christ.

And this is the point where there is sufficient weight to move him. I said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. When did Paul ever persecute Jesus? Did Paul know Jesus? Was Paul there at the trial with Caiaphas or any of the rest of it? We tend to kind of gloss over this.

I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. If you do it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me. And Jesus says, look, this forcing to blaspheme, this imprisoning, this casting the votes and having people executed, you're doing that to me.

This is why Paul says, when you look at the pool of sinners, I am chief. It doesn't mean that he committed more egregious sins than anyone else, but he recognized that he was just like those who put Christ on the cross, because by doing it to the least of the brethren, he had done it to Christ. And he says, you want to find the worst sinners? You can find me in that number, because I have persecuted the very Christ, as all of us do when we sin against one another.

I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Get up and stand on your feet. For this purpose, I have appeared to you to appoint you for salvation, to effectively move you into the kingdom of God from the kingdom of darkness, to rescue the perishing and care for the dying.

Is that what he says? He says, you have a mission. This is not a recruiting visit. This is a fresh set of orders.

He says, don't fight this permanent change of station here. Don't be fighting. I'm here giving you a command, and you need to get up and do it.

I am here to appoint you a minister and a witness, not only to the things which you have seen. Now, if Paul is an unbeliever on the Damascus Road, how has he seen anything belonging to God? Jesus uses the perfect tense here. In the Hebrew, it's fun to take something that's in Greek like this, and you know somebody was originally speaking Hebrew, and retrovert it.

Work it back in. This is what they do in Septuagint studies. You take the Greek text of the Old Testament in the Septuagint, and say, well now, typically, the Septuagint translators use this Greek word to represent this Hebrew word, and you retrovert.

You work back and figure out what the original Hebrew must have been. And it's fun to do that here with the Lord Jesus, whose words we have in Greek, and yet we know He was speaking Hebrew. Get up and stand on your feet.

I would bet you money that this sounds a lot like the Hebrew in Daniel, or the Hebrew in Ezekiel, where God speaks to the prophet and says, get up, stand on your feet. And you can imagine the Apostle Paul, who has studied these passages so many times, seeing these words applied to others, now hears them applied to himself. You get up, you stand on your feet, I have appointed you.

When he has studied all the great prophets of the Old Testament his entire life, he is as steeped in it as anybody. And that's the kind of thing that ought to happen with us. We look at the Word of God, we see Jesus speaking to Paul and other people in the Word of God, and wouldn't it be great if one of these days we recognized that He's speaking to us.

The same words that are being spoken to these people are spoken to us. He's saying, arise, awake, arise from the dead, O sleeping one, and Christ will give you light. And He's talking to us.

When He says, the one who sees me and believes in me, trusts in me, keeps on trusting, keeps on seeing me, I won't lose Him, and I will raise Him up at the last day. That's me. Jesus wants to raise me up.

Jesus wants to raise you up. Jesus wants to speak to us and say, get up on your feet, go to the street, call straight. There you will find what I have appointed for you to do.

Get up, stand on your feet. For this purpose, I have appeared to you to appoint you a minister and a witness, not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you. And this is the strongest evidence for the fact that the Lord Jesus Himself trained the Apostle Paul just as He trained Peter and Andrew and James and John and Philip, Bartholomew, etc.

He says, you have seen a lot of things in your Old Testament studies. I am going to appear to you and teach you the mysteries of the doctrines of Christ, rescuing you from the people, you see Jewish and Italics there because this is the word for the in crowd, and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you. The Laos, L-A-O-S, those are the people, those are your indigenous people, and then the Ethnoi, those are the ethnic, the other people, them and us.

Rescue them not only from us, but also from them. Jesus is a Jew, right? He says, I am going to rescue you not only from our crowd, but also from everybody else. To whom I am sending you.

Now, to whom is Jesus sending him? We've talked about this before. Why was He going

to Jerusalem? Why was He worried about the Jews? And He says, To whom I am sending you. Apostello.

I am apostleing you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the domain of Satan to God. Does it sound familiar at all? Does it sound anything like Ephesians chapter 5? Did Paul get this message and pass it on? That they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me. An inheritance among those.

Lots of people are sanctified by faith for salvation, but how many of us are sanctified for inheritance? How many of us are going to be partakers with Christ? It's going to be the overcomers. So, King Agrippa, Paul says, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea and even to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. Change of mind.

For this reason, some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the prophets and Moses said was going to take place, that the Christ was to suffer and that by reason of his resurrection from the dead, he would be the first to proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles. Very powerful argument from Scripture.

While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you mad. Why does he say it in a loud voice? You remember the situation? Felix oppressed the Jews in Caesarea.

There was a great outcry. He was recalled to Rome. Festus is sent to be the troubleshooter to try to calm things down and get everybody happy again.

Quell the disturbances. So, now Festus is beginning to understand why the Jews are upset and violently angry with Paul because this is radical advance on anything that has ever been pushed forward. This is spreading what began as sort of a local thing in Jerusalem beyond the confines of Jerusalem, going out to the Gentiles, stirring up people in the Diaspora.

It's bad enough that there are disturbances in Israel, in the Roman province of Syria, but if Paul is going and spreading this headache other places in the empire, what's going to happen to Festus? Caesar is going to say, look, man, I sent you down there to quiet that stuff down and you've got this rabble-rouser out there just making things worse. He's like a plague. He's like an infection.

So, Festus says in a loud voice, when you use a loud voice, why do you do that? You're playing to the crowd. You're playing to the audience. And so he looks around and he's

not even looking at Paul when he says this.

He's looking at all the Jews and the surrounding people and he says, ah, Paul, much learning has driven you mad. He's telling everybody, I'm not going to go along with this nutcase. Paul, you're out of your mind.

Your great learning has driven you mad. Paul says, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king," and now he's talking to Agrippa and he's going to play these two guys off against each other.

And what he's implying here is, well, Festus, you're newly out from Rome. I don't know how much you know about Jewish things, but Agrippa here knows. Paul is a master of taking two factions or two groups or two people and getting them to look at each other and take a little of the heat off of himself.

So he says, the king here, Agrippa, knows about these matters and I speak to him also with confidence since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice for this has not been done in a corner. This is not the first time he's heard about the Christ, heard about the resurrection, heard about Christianity, heard that this is the fulfillment of the prophets. This is old news to Agrippa who has in his hegemony Lebanon and the northern portions of Israel including parts of Galilee belong to Agrippa.

He knows about this. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? Notice he does not respond for very long to the accusation that he's out of his mind. Festus says, you're out of your mind, Paul.

He says, no, I'm not. And then he moves on and he says, ask Agrippa. He knows about this kind of stuff.

Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do. Agrippa replied to Paul, in a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian. This is a difficult piece of Greek to translate because it literally says, let me try to give this to you, 28 from the Greek.

He says, en oligo me paithes Christianon poiesai. En oligo. You've heard of an oligarchy? You know what an oligarchy is in history and politics? It's a rule by the few, right? An oligarchy is you have a few people controlling everybody.

Well, oligo here, en oligoi, means a little, a few, not much. So he says, en, en, the preposition means in, by, or with. In so little, with so little, by so little, are you trying to make me a Christian? Basically he said, and so does it mean in a little time? Or does it mean with such a little argument do you persuade me to become a Christian? But he just says, with so little, are you persuading me to be a Christian? And Paul, we don't know exactly what he's talking about.

Paul says, I would wish to God that whether in a little or in much, not only you, but all

who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these bonds, except for these chains. So it doesn't really matter if it's time or if it's argument. Paul says, whether in little or whether in much, I would, that everyone who's hearing the sound of my voice would become as I am, a believer in Christ, a servant of God in this way, except for these chains.

The king stood up, and the governor, and Bernice, the sister consort of Agrippa, and those who were sitting with them, their little retinue. And when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, this man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment. And Agrippa said to Festus, this man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

How do we know that this is what Agrippa said to Festus? Because there are servants in the household of the governor who are Christians. There are people in the retinue of Agrippa and Festus who are in the body, who stood up with him, who went to the other room with him, who heard the conversations, and then who at worship next Sunday said, you know what Agrippa said to Festus? If Paul hadn't appealed to Caesar, they would have turned him loose. And you can imagine the conversation that that might have stirred.

Did Paul make a strategic mistake by appealing to Caesar or not? Well, that remains to be seen, although I think not. I think when Jesus appears to Paul when he's still in Jerusalem, and says, you have testified for me in Jerusalem, you will testify for me in Rome, Paul knows what his course is, and he gets a royal escort to take him right where God wants him to be, which is not Jerusalem. They don't say, we're going to send you back to Jerusalem that you'll be tried by the Sanhedrin.

You're going to see Caesar. And that's exactly where he was supposed to have been headed in the first place. So God works all things together for good.

But what's our final point here? You see the heart of Paul. He says, if it's a little, if it's a lot, whether by my life or by my death, I will be all things to all men if by all means I may save some. And when he says save, he's not just talking about get them a ticket out of the hot place, get them physically resurrected.

He is saying save in the same sense that he says eternal life. We need to be delivered out of operational death. We need to be delivered out of the doldrums, out of torpor, out of the becalmed state that we sometimes find ourselves in as believers where we are not abiding in the vine.

We are not pushing out fruit. God can't, He doesn't even know where to start pruning because we're nothing but a dead branch. If He pruned at all, He would prune the whole thing out.

Paul says, I would that you were as I am, but free. You get the idea that Paul says, I wish that I was as I am without these chains. And he kind of realizes that this is kind of an alternate route to the same destination and he would have rather done it without the chains.

When's the last time we had bondage and Paul in the same sentence? Agabus doing the dying cockroach with his clothing, right? And Paul says, you know, I kind of wish I was doing what I'm doing but without these chains. I wish all of you were like me, serving God, reaching for the resurrection, pushing toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus and free. And that's our opportunity.

We're not in chains. We're not in bondage to anyone but Christ. And we have such a great opportunity to awake from the dead, to arise and let Christ give us light, to take those words, to partake of his flesh, to partake of his blood, to exploit the potential of the new covenant and to be raised up.

It's not our benefit that is primarily in view. We are always unworthy servants, but it is the will of God that Jesus raise us up. It is the will of God that we reflect his glory.

It is the will of God. And if we don't care anything about ourselves, we ought to care about the plan of God. We ought to be as Paul, without the chains, pushing for the high calling, the raising up, the honest me of God in Christ Jesus.

Well, food for thought. We'll pick up in a new chapter next time. Father, thank you for the privilege of studying your word together.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will breathe life into these words in our souls, minister them to our hearts in such a way that we are motivated and encouraged and strengthened, transformed and equipped to fulfill your will in our lives, both now and in the ages to come. We thank you for your word. We pray that you will be with us in the days ahead.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.