

Triple Plays and Power Plays

Something like a baseball triple play, Paul is tossed around among the various players in Caesarea—from Felix to Festus to Agrippa. Perhaps it is a bit analogous to being a contestant in *American Idol* - Paul the consummate curiosity, a thing to be marveled at on the one hand and pitied on the other. In such a play of power, it would have been easy for Paul to shrink within, becoming cowed to the inevitable doom awaiting a man imprisoned by the powerful. No doubt, the two years of Paul's house arrest had taken their toll. Despite the power plays among these rulers, God's mercy emerged more powerful still, surrounding their actions with redemptive opportunities.

As Paul stands before King Agrippa in Acts 26, waiting his turn to speak, we know little about the preceding two years of his confinement. Nonetheless, he emerges as a witness who is ready to speak, making the most of his moment before his extraordinary audience. Instead of acquiring the posture of a victim, Paul converts the moment into a testimony of the Blessed Hope. His choices before the King offer encouragement to every believer who prepares for his or her own turn before the curious.

Monday – “Every Opportunity”

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.” Colossians 4:5

1. Please read Acts 26:1-8.

Text Insight – It is intriguing to see the choices that Paul makes in his case. In the confluence of the Jewish and Roman cultures, Paul relies on Jewish Scriptures but also employs Roman appreciation of the art of rhetoric, the available means of persuasion.

2. As Paul stands before one of the most powerful men in the land, he does not appear to be intimidated. How would you describe Paul's demeanor and why do you think he was able to take such a courageous stand?
3. Hope is a surprising element in the context of Paul's defense of himself. What connections does the concept of hope create between Paul and his hearers?

Putting it into Practice: You probably already know someone who would find the hope of redemption in Jesus to be appealing. Pray that God would create an opportunity for you to share this hope with that person this week.

Tuesday – Narrating Our Spiritual Journey

1. Please read Acts 26:9-18. Reading this section, it is easy to be impressed by the simplicity of Paul's witness: he simply tells the story of his conversion. It is easy to complicate matters when sharing our faith. What are Paul's main points in this section?
2. In this section, Paul simply narrates what happened. If you were to simply narrate what has happened in your own experience with Christ, what would the main points be?
3. Pray that God would give you an opportunity this week to share from your past.

Wednesday – Overcoming Objections

1. Please read Acts 26:19-27. This passage contains one of the two most startling elements in Paul's testimony: the evidence for his defense. What do you think of Paul's argument?
2. After being interrupted by a shouting king, Paul offers a reply. Study this exchange carefully. What seems to upset Agrippa so thoroughly? What do you notice in Paul's reply to this upset king?

Putting it into Practice: We all have individuals in our lives who react to us by being upset or oppositional. Pray for those in your life who are difficult to love.

Thursday – Coming Clean

“Paul never proclaimed the good news in a vacuum, however, but always in a context, the personal context of his hearers.” John Stott, “The Message of Acts”

1. Please read Acts 26: 28-29. This section contains the other shocker: the plain yet compassionate manner in which Paul expresses his hope for Agrippa's conversion. What kind of person takes the bold step of seeking to convert a king like Agrippa?

Text Insight – Agrippa was from a long line of rulers (the family of Herods) who were known for being worldly, ambitious, and morally corrupt. They were known for their opposition to truth and righteousness.

2. How is Paul's commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) seen in these verses?

Worth Considering – Arrange to have coffee or take a walk with a friend this weekend and pray that God would guide the conversation to a level where you can be transparent (as Paul was) about your love for Christ and his role in your life.

Friday – The Heart of Christ

1. Please read Acts 26: 15-18. There is a danger of turning our Christian witness into rhetorical strategies or methods. Though Paul is a prepared witness, his life transcends the performing arts. Which elements of Christ's call of Paul seize your heart?
2. In this passage we get a clear sense of what Christ hopes to rescue us from and lead us into. What does Christ hope to rescue us from? What kind of life does he desire to lead us into?
3. In what area(s) of your life are you in need of the light, power, and forgiveness of Christ? Tell the Lord of your need for him to invade these areas of your life with his light, power and forgiveness. Thank him for hearing your prayer.

For the Weekend:

What do you think that most people learn about Christianity from your witness? Please read Acts 26:15-18, Christ's commissioning of Paul. To what degree is Paul's commission from Christ your own?