

# Paul: From Persecutor to Preacher

## Lesson 10: On Trial for the Hope of the Resurrection -- Acts 26

It was the kind of audience most people only dream of, and most would dread. King Agrippa had come to Caesarea with his sister Bernice, and the governor Festus arranged a grand hearing. Luke says they entered “with great pomp,” the military officers and the prominent men of the city filling the hall. And then a prisoner was brought in, in chains, to speak. Paul had languished in custody for two years, and now he stood before royalty, not as a defeated man, but as a witness with a story to tell and a hope to declare.

Paul stretched out his hand and began, and what he gave was not so much a legal defense as a testimony. He told them who he had been: a strict Pharisee, blameless by the law, so zealous that he had hunted Christians from city to city and cast his vote for their deaths. He told them what had happened on the road to Damascus, the light brighter than the sun, the voice of the risen Jesus, the commission to go to the Gentiles “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” And he told them why he was really on trial: “It is with respect to the hope and resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”

That was the heart of it. Strip away the politics and the charges, and Paul stood accused for one thing: the resurrection. “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?” he asked the room. He testified that Christ had suffered and that, “by being the first to rise from the dead,” He had proclaimed light to Jew and Gentile alike. The whole Christian faith, Paul insisted, rises or falls on an empty tomb and the hope it secures, that the God who raised Jesus will raise His people too.

It was too much for Festus, who burst out, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” But Paul answered calmly, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.” Then he turned to the king himself: “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” And Agrippa, feeling the pull, deflected: “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” Paul’s reply was breathtaking, a prisoner in chains wishing his freedom on his judges: “I would to God that . . . all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains.” This lesson stands in that courtroom and considers the hope that put Paul on trial, the resurrection that is the anchor of the Christian faith.

**Group Discussion:** Paul said he was on trial for one thing: “the hope and resurrection of the dead” (Acts 26:6–8). For Paul, the resurrection was not a minor doctrine but the center of everything. Why do you think the resurrection was so central to Paul, and is it as central to our own faith and hope as it was to his?

**Personal Reflection:** When King Agrippa felt the pull of the gospel, he deflected with a question and stopped short of obeying it (Acts 26:28). Have you ever been ‘almost persuaded,’ moved by the truth but holding back from fully surrendering to Christ in some area? What keeps you from saying a full yes?

*Read Acts 26*

## Study Questions

1. Paul told the court, “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?” and said he was on trial “with respect to the hope and resurrection of the dead” (Acts 26:6–8). Why was the resurrection the very heart of the matter for Paul, and why is the hope of resurrection so central to the Christian faith?
2. Paul staked his whole life and hope on the resurrection. Where is your own deepest hope anchored, in comfort, success, and security in this life, or in the promise of resurrection and life with God beyond it? How would your priorities change if the resurrection truly anchored your hope?
3. Paul recounted his conversion and the commission he received: to turn people “from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18). How does this verse summarize what the gospel actually does in a person’s life?
4. Paul was not ashamed to tell his own story of turning from darkness to light, even before a king. What is your own story of coming to Christ, and how readily do you share it? Who in your life needs to hear how God turned you from darkness to light?
5. Paul declared that Christ, “by being the first to rise from the dead,” would “proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23). What does it mean that Jesus was “the first to rise from the dead,” and how does His resurrection secure the hope of resurrection for all who belong to Him?
6. Because Christ is risen, death is not the end for those who are in Him. How does the hope of the resurrection change the way you face death, grief, suffering, and loss? Where do you most need that hope to take hold of your heart right now?
7. When Festus called him insane, Paul replied that he was “speaking true and rational words” (Acts 26:25), and he reasoned from the Scriptures and from public facts that ‘were not done in a corner.’ Why is it important to see that the Christian faith, and the resurrection in particular, rests on true and reasonable grounds rather than on blind belief?
8. Paul testified boldly before a governor and a king without being intimidated. Are there people, important, skeptical, or powerful, before whom you grow timid about your faith? How does Paul’s example, and the confidence the resurrection gives, help you stand firm and speak the truth with respect?
9. Paul centered the Christian hope on the bodily resurrection: Christ raised as “the first to rise from the dead,” securing the resurrection of His people. How does the New Testament present this hope, the one return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment

to come, and how does keeping the resurrection central guard us from anchoring our hope in lesser, more speculative things?

10. Look back over Paul's testimony before Agrippa, the hope that put him on trial, the risen Christ, the call from darkness to light, and the king who was almost persuaded. Name one specific way you sense Jesus using this account to form you, whether to anchor your hope in the resurrection, to share your story boldly, or to answer His call without delay.

### **Now or Later**

**Reflect on these passages:** 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, Christ the firstfruits, those who belong to Him raised at His coming, then the end; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, the dead in Christ raised when the Lord descends; John 5:28–29, all in the tombs hearing His voice in one hour, to the resurrection of life or judgment; Acts 24:15, a resurrection of both the just and the unjust; Philippians 3:20–21, awaiting the Savior who will transform our lowly bodies