

THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL (vv. 24-29)

There is a wonderful irony in the final scene of Acts 26. Agrippa is enjoying all the privileges of wealth and power. Paul has been stripped of all human freedom. Through the gospel, however, the roles are reversed. In spite of the chains, Paul is the one who is truly free.

²⁴ At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

²⁵ "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

²⁹ Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

1. How does the pursuit of power and wealth lead to slavery?
2. What are some other things that tend to enslave us?
3. How does the gospel free us from everything that would enslave us?
4. How do we experience the freedom of the gospel?

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**THE STORY CONTINUES****THE GOSPEL ON TRIAL | ACTS 25-26**

The last time we checked in on Paul, he was on trial before the Roman governor Felix. Felix is not sure what to do with Paul, so he keeps him in custody as a favor to the powerful Jewish ruling party.

Two years have passed. Paul has written letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. He tells the believers in Colossae that he has also written a letter to the church in Laodecia, and that they should read it, if they can get their hands on a copy. Paul may have written any number of letters. We would love to get our hands on all of them, but only the two are preserved for us.

Felix has been replaced by Festus. The new governor pays a visit to Jerusalem. The ruling council asks him to remand Paul to their custody as a token of good will. They are not interested in another round of hearings. They are set on ambushing Paul, killing him and silencing his voice forever. Festus invites them to Caesarea for another round of hearings. They make their case. Paul makes his case. Festus has a hard time sorting out their differences, but he is convinced that Paul has done nothing to offend Rome. Like Felix before him, Festus would love to engender the good will of the Sanhedrin, so he asks Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem.

Paul sees where this going, so he exercises his prerogative as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar. If Paul wants to make his case in Rome, Festus is obligated to provide him safe passage to Rome, but he has no idea how to frame the controversy for Caesar.

Enter King Agrippa. In spite of the lofty title, he is a minor Roman official whose family had ruled in Judea for generations. We know them as the Herod family. We've already met his great grandfather, Herod the Great; his great uncles Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod the Tetrarch; and his father, Herod Agrippa I. They are among the chief villains in the New Testament story.

King Agrippa is the perfect person to help Festus navigate the turbulent waters of all things Jewish. As Paul presents his case before Agrippa, he makes one of his most powerful defenses of the gospel. He describes the hope of the gospel; the content and power of the gospel; the demands of the gospel and the freedom he has found in the gospel.

THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL (6:4-8)

While there are a number of differences between Paul and his accusers, Paul insists that they share the same background and have the same hope. For Paul, the hope of Israel and the hope of the gospel are one and the same. They find their ultimate fulfillment in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

⁴ *“The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. ⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”*

1. How does Paul describe his life before his dramatic encounter with Christ?
2. How would you describe the hope of Israel?
3. How is the hope of Israel fulfilled in Christ?
4. How is the resurrection central to the hope we have in Christ?

THE CONTENT AND POWER OF THE GOSPEL (6:12-18)

As Paul describes his dramatic encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus, he describes Christ's call on his life and the power of the message that has been entrusted to his care. Paul is called to be a servant and a witness of everything he had seen and would see of Christ. Jesus tells Paul that the gospel will turn people from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God, forgive their sins and dramatically change their standing before a holy God.

¹² *“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying*

to me in Aramaic, ‘I ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

¹⁵ *“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’*

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

1. How does Paul describe the content of the gospel in verse 16?
2. How does Paul describe the power of the gospel in verse 18?
3. How does the gospel turn us from darkness to light?
4. How does the gospel turn us from the power of Satan to the power of God?
5. How does the gospel address our sin problem?
6. How should these verses impact the way we think about the gospel and explain it to others?

THE DEMANDS OF THE GOSPEL (6:19-20)

Paul moves beyond the content and the power of the gospel to describe the demands of the gospel. He describes for Agrippa the message he proclaimed to Jew and Gentile alike.

¹⁹ *“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.”^x*

1. According to verse 20, how does Paul challenge people to respond to the truth of the gospel?
2. What does it mean to repent?
3. What does it mean to turn to God?
4. What role do “deeds” play in our response to the gospel?
5. What does it tell us about our response to the gospel if we never really repent, if we have not turned to God in any meaningful way, or if there are no deeds in keeping with repentance?