

Approaching God

Read this portion of Psalm 51 and begin with an opening prayer

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. (Ps 51:1-4)

Ask God to help you see how that when we sin, either against others, or even against ourselves, that we are ultimately sinning against God himself because we are his treasured possessions. Ask God to help you connect to his heart in repentance in the places he's most grieved over our sin.

Acts 26:1-32

Passage Introduction: Paul's Defense Before Agrippa

Chapter 26 contains the entirety of Paul's defense before King Agrippa. As has been noted before, writing letters in the ancient world bore a significant cost. Each and every word here, then, has a cost associated with it. For Luke to record this message in full means he viewed it as a significant moment in his narrative and necessary for the health of the church.

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

Circle, Underline, or Highlight Key words that stand out to you as you read

Acts 26:1-32 - 1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: **2** "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, **3** and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

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?

vs. 12-18

For a third and final time in Acts, we hear the story of Paul on the road to Damascus. What are the distinct elements here of his mission and message to the Gentiles that Jesus gives to Paul? Circle, underline, or highlight what stands out

9 “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **10** And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. **11** Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

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, ‘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.’ **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. **21** That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. **22** But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— **23** that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

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

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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.” **30** The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. **31** After they left the room, they began saying to one another, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.” **32** Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Questions for Reflection & Meditation

- As Paul begins his defense in 26:1-11, what connections does he make between Christian faith and the Jewish religion?
- Agrippa cleverly avoids giving a direct answer to Paul’s question in 26:27. Why would it be difficult for Agrippa to answer either yes or no? What do you think makes people reluctant today to speak either clearly for or against Jesus?
- What personally strikes you most about Paul in this chapter, and why?

Key Takeaway:

As you read today’s passage, what are 1 or 2 main takeaways that you wrote down in the margins? How would you briefly summarize your observations and meditations for today?

Close in Prayer:

Pray that you will be able to discern when to wait for the Lord to act and when to take action yourself. Pray that God will show you how Paul’s example can be a guide for you in difficult situations.