

Sermon Supplement, Lord's Day, January 13, 2008
 Kihei Baptist Chapel, Kihei, Maui, Hawaii
 MESSAGE SERIES: LIVING ON THE EDGE OF ALMOST
 Part one: Living on the Edge of Almost Persuaded, Acts 2:28
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LIVING ON THE EDGE OF ALMOST PERSUADED, Acts 2:28-32

I. INTRODUCTION: With some exceptions, "Living on the Edge of Almost" may be a fair description of the present whole Christian world. Certainly, the scriptures anticipate God's disapproval of the present church age.

The Apostle John prophetically wrote of the mind of Christ relating to this time by writing His angelic message to the church that would be, "rich, increased with goods, and having need of nothing," but would not even know that Christ considered the church as "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked", Revelation 3:17-19. Christ related that He would be outside the church knocking to get in. Revelation 3:20.

Jesus clearly stated His disappointment with the positions and programs of the church of our day in questioning its validity by asking the question, "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8.

Paul described the last day church as one that has, "itching ears", II Timothy 4:3 — people who only want to hear what pleases them or call for no incontinence in their lives.

Mediocrity and indifference may be the plague of much of the present Christian world. Some people almost want to become believers and some believers almost want to become serious in their belief. The first won't change unless the second does.

II. HISTORICAL SETTING: By the time of the history of Acts chapter 26 Paul and those traveling with him were on their third missionary trip, Acts 18:23-21:17. Paul returned to Jerusalem knowing by divine revelation, 21:4, and by the prophet Agabus that he would be arrested and "bound". Paul's reply was that he was ready for imprisonment and death if it glorified Christ, 21:13.

Agabus' prophecy became reality when Paul taught in the temple courtyard and thought he had brought Gentiles with him. He did this to teach the church is neither Jewish nor Gentile and that all people are saved by God's grace when they place their faith in Christ's death as

payment for their sins and that this salvation is no longer to be accompanied with priests, religious rituals and ceremonial laws. The crowds at the temple were stirred into anger against Paul to the point that they were trying to kill him. The anger grew into a city wide rebellion which was only brought under control by the Roman soldiers, Acts 21:27-32. Paul was beaten, bound in chains and placed under arrest, 21:33-40.

Following Paul's arrest he made His defense of the gospel of free grace before the Hebrews, who rejected the gospel and planned to stone him to death as they had Stephen. At this time Paul was warned that everywhere he would go he would be arrested and imprisoned, Acts 22:24. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he had the right to protection and a defense, if necessary, all the way to the courts of Rome, Acts 22:25-30. Paul later defended himself to the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel, and then to the Pharisees. Instead of freeing Paul, a group of 40 men took an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they killed Paul, Acts 23:1-12. When Paul's nephew learned of the plot to kill Paul in front of the council (the same council that "tried" Christ) he was again spared because of his Roman citizenship and moved to the port city of Caesarea where he was kept in security for two years, Acts 23:13-35.

In Caesarea Paul made three defenses of believer's right to believe in Christ and to preach the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Following his charge and defense to Felix, the Roman Governor, Festus, who replaced Festus and Herod Agrippa II, Acts 23:34-26:32, he sailed to Rome to make himself a test-case for the protection of all believers, before the highest courts in Rome.

The message, Living on the Edge of Almost Persuasion, that follows is part of the result of Paul's defense before Agrippa, Acts 26.

III. PAUL'S TRIAL DEFENCE:

Paul defended himself and other believers before Felix, governor of Caesarea, who left Paul under arrest, Festus, who replaced Felix after two years Acts 24:27, Herod Agrippa II, who was on a royal visit to Caesarea (this Herod was the great grandson of Herod the Great and son of the Herod that killed the Apostle James) and Bernice who was Agrippa's sister and widowed wife of his uncle also of the Herod family, came with Agrippa to visit Caesarea. (There are six Herods in the New Testament days. cf notes on the leaders of the New Testament)

A. PAUL'S OPENING STATEMENT, 26:1-3

Paul's opening statement acknowledge his pleasure in presenting his case to one who was a third generation of the family of Herods knowing that

they were very well informed of the Jewish laws, beliefs, and customs of the Jewish leaders --- leaders that had accused him of blaspheming God, associating with Gentiles and teaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul stretched out his bound hands to the king in anticipation of being freed by Agrippa, 26:27.

B. PAUL'S TESTIMONY OF HIS LIFE; 26:4-13

In Paul's defense he first called attention to his Hebrew family background, his religious position as a Pharisee, his rejection of the Sadducees. He was a brilliant up and coming leader of Israel. He openly admitted to being the chief opposition to the Christian faith and as such he had caused suffering, imprisonment, and death to many believers before his conversion. Those whom he did not drive out of town, he drove underground.

Paul also openly stated his belief in Christ as the "hope" of the Jewish fathers, namely that Jesus was the Messiah long hoped for. The issue behind Paul's arrest was that he believed God could raise the dead. The Sadducees rejection of life after death and any form of eternal spiritual existence was the precise concept that Paul now defended. The resurrection of Jesus is the essential doctrine of Pauline writing. He did not then nor would he now consider anyone who rejected this basic doctrine as being Christian.

C. PAUL'S TESTIMONY OF HIS CONVERSION, 26:12-23

Paul presented the change in his life as evidence of his conversion to Christ. This conversion is recorded in detail in Acts 9 and summarized in his testimony to Agrippa. The essential information presented was: 1) he was on his way to Damascus to arrest and convict Christians, 2) he was blinded by a great light source and heard a voice from heaven, 3) the voice and light were identified as the resurrected Jesus, 4) the chief bitter enemy against Christ became the greatest foundational leader of the Christian church. He was used by God to lead the Christian faith into the Gentile world, write 13 books of the New Testament and train the other disciples in both ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) and eschatology (doctrine of end time events). God's forgiving grace was demonstrated more perfectly in Saul the persecutor becoming Paul the Apostle!

D. PAUL'S GOVERNMENTAL OPPOSITION, 26:24-29

1. BY FESTUS, 26: 24-26

Festus openly shouted publicly against Paul's defense of himself. He accused him of being insane as a result of being so highly trained academically.

Paul's response was that he only taught truth with its source in God rather than in philosophers or religious leaders. He had not appealed to his superior education as a defense, but rather his conversion and his public ministry.

Festus refused to release Paul in part because he rejected the gospel but also because he wanted bribe money and he desired to please the Jewish leaders.

2. BY AGRIPPA, 26:27-29

Agrippa was far from thinking Paul was a mentally unbalanced man. In fact, he was impressed by Paul's strong arguments and purpose.

Paul's appeal to Agrippa was based on Agrippa's Hebrew background and understanding of Hebrew prophets. Paul took it for granted that everyone knew that Agrippa, as part Jewish, professed belief in the Old Testament prophet and the Hebrew religion, 26:3.

Agrippa's response to Paul was, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." While the translation of this statement could will be, "with this little persuasion you expect me to be a Christian?" It could also be, "would you in such little time persuade me to be a Christian?" Most likely, it could be translated, "Paul, thou art too hasty, thou cannot expect to make a convert out of me so suddenly." In any case, it is clear that Paul had made an impression on Agrippa that caused him to seriously think about Christ being the promised Messiah as stated by the Old Testament Prophets. Felix trembled before Paul, Acts 24:25, and Agrippa almost believed. Yet, both rejected. Fear and almost believing actually condemned rather than redeemed them!

Paul ended his presentation to Agrippa with a prayer that Agrippa and all others would become believers and forgiven by God.

IV. PAUL'S VERDICT, 26:30-32

Felix, Festus, Agrippa and Bernice all agreed that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment. Yet, they would not set him free because Paul wanted the case to be heard in Rome. If the highest Roman courts freed him then all believers would be free throughout the empire. Paul's trip to Rome eventually caused him more imprisonment and death.