

## **In step with Jesus 153**

**May 11, 2025**

**Key Text: “But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. 10 And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. 11 And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 11: 9-11)**

### **Introduction**

Last week we read about Festus’ testimony concerning Paul before Agrippa. Festus did not find anything against Paul, and he was unable to make up stories against him. His concluding statements as presented Paul’s case before Agrippa are as follows: “But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore, I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him”. The above statement from Festus was not just a witness in favor of Paul, but also a rebuke against the Jews. While Festus, a ‘pagan governor’, struggled to find reasons to condemn Paul, the self-righteous Jews, who knew the ten commandments, were quick to bear false witness against Paul. However, we already know that God was still moving through all the false accusations and persecutions of the Jews against Paul to accomplish His purpose. His purpose was that the gospel be preached to all nations, even when preaching the gospel will involve standing in trial before governors and kings.

Today we will start reading Acts Chapter 26. The chapter provides a detailed account of Paul’s testimony before King Agrippa and King Agrippa’s response to the gospel. Chapter 26 is a long reading so we will just read verse one to eleven.

Acts 26: 1 -11

**26** So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: <sup>2</sup>“I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, <sup>3</sup> especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

<sup>4</sup>“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. <sup>5</sup>They have known for a long time, if they

are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. <sup>6</sup> And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, <sup>7</sup> to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! <sup>8</sup> Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

<sup>9</sup> "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup> And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

## **Reflections**

Paul considered himself fortunate to speak before King Agrippa and his goal was not just to prove his innocence but to witness to the king. There was no record that Paul rehearsed what he would say, but according to Jesus' promise, the Holy Spirit gave him words to speak before Agrippa. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul spoke about his personal experience and encounter with Jesus Christ. As he had done in previous trials, he clarified the reason for which he was arrested and tried, affirming his faith and hope for the resurrection of the dead.

One thing that caught my attention is how Paul had repeatedly identified himself as a Pharisee. He believed in the things that some of his accusers believed in, and he had led a campaign of persecution against the disciples, based on his convictions about his religion but something had changed. Paul had become a different kind of Pharisee. In other words, Paul was a Pharisee that was making a difference. He was no longer the nominally religious person; he had had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. He was no longer the angry persecutor but a joyful proclaimer of the hope of the resurrection.

As we reflect on Paul's experience, it is our privilege to know that nominal religion will accomplish nothing for us. Nominal religion will progressively lead us from being hypocrites to persecutors of the righteous and to complete denial of God. Only an encounter with Jesus Christ will save. I pray that we all will have that encounter that will change our lives so that we can have influence wherever we go.