

## **In step with Jesus 154**

**May 18, 2025**

**Key Text “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”. (Mathew 24:14)**

### **Introduction**

Last week we started reading about Paul’s trial before King Agrippa. We noted that Festus inadvertently took up a dual role as Paul’s prosecutor and defense attorney. Festus presented Paul before the king for trial, but even before Paul could say anything, he declared him innocent by stating that he had not found him guilty of anything deserving of death or imprisonment. Like Festus, we know that Paul was innocent, but we also know that God was working behind the scenes to accomplish His purposes. Through Paul’s arrest and trials, God was extending His invitation of love and mercy to them governors, the king and their people. Through Paul’s testimonies, God was giving them opportunities to make informed choices for or against Him. Paul knew God’s purpose and had become a Pharisee with a difference. He was living for Jesus. Therefore, his arrest and trial before governors and the king were not counted as burdens but as opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ. We could see from our reading that Paul’s testimony before Agrippa was not a plea for freedom but an appeal to the king and others to repent and turn to Jesus Christ. Today’s reading is a continuation of Paul’s testimony before Agrippa. We will also read about the different ways that Festus and Agrippa responded to Paul’s testimony. Let us read the remaining verses of Acts chapter 26 and see what we can learn for ourselves.

### **Acts 26: 12 - 30**

12 “In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15 And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 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 a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ 19 “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. 21

For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 22 To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” 25 But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. 26 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” 28 And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” 29 And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

30 Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. 31 And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

## **Reflections**

Paul told his conversion story again and the crust of the story is that his life had changed because He saw Jesus, the light of the world, and had received a mandate from Him to go and preach the gospel. His encounter with Jesus had changed him from being the Chief Priests’ errand boy to a disciple of Jesus Christ. He was not ignorant of the sufferings and trials he would face in his ministry, but he had decided to follow Jesus and was not going to be disobedient to the heavenly vision he received. However, his vision was not a wired encounter with no scriptural foundation but an encounter that confirmed his beliefs in Moses and the prophets.

In response to Paul’s appeal, Festus said that he was mad, Agrippa said the time was too short for Paul to persuade him to become a Christian, and others were silent. We do not know if anybody decided for Jesus on that day, but Paul had done his work. He had preached the gospel as a witness to the people, but he could not force them to decide. You and I have heard the gospel. We have known the love of God in Jesus Christ but each one of us must decide what to do with Jesus and His servants. Like Festus, we can choose to say that Jesus’ servants are mad; like Agrippa, we can postpone our decision making; we can choose to sit on the fence and do and say nothing like Bernice and others, but we can also decide to follow Jesus like Paul did. I have decided to follow Jesus and there is no turning back. And, like Paul, I appeal to you today to join me as I walk with Jesus. He never failed Paul, He has never failed me, and He will never fail you.