

**Text: Ac 26.24-26**

We've come to the end of the last major speech in the book of Acts. Our text will take us through a seeming interruption from Festus, but Paul takes his interruption into account to bring his gospel message to a forceful conclusion.

Our message today will deal with the force of that conclusion, a force which continues to resonate to our own day.

We are grateful to have in our church Christians from all over the world. We have folks from Africa, Asia, the Pacific islands. Our heritage includes various parts of Europe as well. We even have some with a Jewish background who are now believers in Jesus.

That's our background, and it is a testament to the power of the gospel.

When we observe the scene in Acts 26, we are in the early days of Christianity. The life and work of Jesus took place in mostly just Judaea and Palestine. It came to the attention of the people of that region and to the governing authorities in charge of these regions.

At the time, distant Rome and other places in the empire had no idea of what was happening in Palestine.

Yet, in Acts 26, we are now roughly 27 years on, and people across the Roman Empire have heard of Jesus and the gospel message. The knowledge isn't universal. With Festus, for example, I think the message Paul brings is quite new and strange.

Yet the events of Christ's life were not secret, hidden away, and now some new idea taught like the mystery cults of the ancient world, with the doctrines a closely guarded secret.

No, the central idea of Christianity involved a very public event. Paul makes much of this in his appeal to Agrippa, and it forms part of the challenge that Agrippa must deal with as Paul calls on him to believe.

That same principle is true, even more so, now in our age. Christianity and its claims are well known. They are such that men ought to carefully consider them and make a personal faith decision.

Our title is:

*Not Done in a Corner*

The idea of our message is that *men ought to believe that which is very well known*.

**Proposition:** Men ought to believe that which is very well known

## I. The common reaction to the gospel: unbelief

### A. A normal Roman reaction

1. Festus was a political Roman, with a common approach to religion
  - a. Roman society full of paganism (household gods, public religion)
  - b. Many were cynical, but participated culturally [went through the forms of religion]
  - c. Little belief in supernatural
2. Beliefs in Rome derived from ancient Gk philosophy
  - a. Their OT was Homer
  - b. Their NT was Plato
  - c. They had no hope of resurrection

“Whatever the philosophical speculation about the afterlife, in the greco-roman world death was felt as a grievous loss both to the dying and to the bereaved. ... Death was all-powerful. One could neither escape it in the first place nor break its power once it had come. The ancient world was ... divided into those who said that resurrection couldn’t happen, though they might have wanted it to, and those who said they didn’t want it to happen, knowing that it couldn’t anyway.”<sup>1</sup>

### B. Festus reacted only after Paul mentioned resurrection

1. He complimented Paul for his much learning

This indicates Paul’s message was much longer than we have recorded: likely Paul cited many sources, esp. the OT.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Life after Death: The Afterlife in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” Zondervan Academic, accessed July 9, 2022, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/death-afterlife-greco-roman-antiquity>.

2. He submitted to listening to the body of the message
  - a. Paul's testimony
  - b. Paul's appeal to the prophets
3. He interrupted when Paul mentioned resurrection
4. Compare the reaction of the crowd on Mars Hill in Athens:

Ac 17.32-33 ¶ Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." <sup>33</sup> So Paul went out of their midst.

### C. The pervasive thought of our world

1. "He's gone to a better place."
2. Or, "It's all over for him."

The first view is essentially Platonism, the second despair inducing secularism.

Platonism viewed the dead in a better place: "The soul would therefore not only continue after bodily death; it would be delighted to do so. If it had known earlier where its real interests lay it would have been longing for this very moment. It would now flourish in a new way, released from its enslaving prison. Its new environment would be just what it ought to have wanted. ... The fact that all this sounds quite familiar in our world shows the extent to which modern western culture has been affected by Platonism."<sup>2</sup>

3. When Paul, or we, talk of resurrection
  - a. Festus thought Paul mad
  - b. Our world thinks us mad

---

<sup>2</sup> "Life after Death."

## II. The calm reiteration of the gospel: appeal to evidence

### A. A measured response

#### 1. From Merriam-Webster

**1:** marked by due proportion ...

**3:** DELIBERATE, CALCULATED <a *measured* response><sup>3</sup>

2. When someone responds, “you’re crazy” it seems natural to at least be defensive, if not go on offense

3. “I am not out of my mind...”

4. Notice the polite reference: “most excellent Festus”

### B. A polite contradiction: I utter “words of sober truth”

1. The word Paul uses here (“sober”) is an important word in Gk philosophy

2. Plato called it “moral sanity”<sup>4</sup>

3. Opposite of *hubris* (pride), which can result in madness

“A hubristic person may display a loss of contact with reality and an overestimation of their own capabilities.”<sup>5</sup>

### C. An appeal to witnesses: “For the king knows...” (26)

1. The king (with a reputation as a pious Jew) knew the prophets, could confirm Paul’s citations

2. The king was well-informed: “none of these things escape his notice”

a. The doings in Judea a generation ago

b. The developments among the Jews subsequently (including the rise of the church)

<sup>3</sup> Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

<sup>4</sup> “Sophrosyne,” in *Wikipedia*, June 1, 2022,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sophrosyne&oldid=1090946041>.

<sup>5</sup> Anne-Laure Le Cunff, “Sophrosyne: The Art of Mindful Moderation,” *Ness Labs* (blog), February 9, 2021, <https://nesslabs.com/sophrosyne>.

D. An appeal to evidence: “this has not been done in a corner”

1. The phrase “speaking in a corner” ridiculed ancient philosophers as “out of touch” with real life
2. These things (the things of Christ) weren’t esoteric mystery doctrines, rather:

“Paul argues that Christian claims are public facts, dismissed or ignored by others only because of the others’ bias.”<sup>6</sup>

My main point in this section is that the things Paul spoke of were well known, not that his response was restrained, though his response *is* instructive for us!

E. We can’t emphasize enough, however, that Christianity is based on known events, occurring in public

1. The commonly held public conceptions of the ancient world could not explain the known events of the gospel
2. The only alternative to faith was a willful closing of the eyes: “nothing to see here”

### III. The continuing requirement of the gospel: increasing believability

A. Christianity is now almost 2000 years old, and increasingly “not done in a corner”

As we come to the end of the message, I’d like you to think about our history.

1. Paul rightly reminds Agrippa of the public evidence for Christianity in the 1<sup>st</sup> century
2. The history of Christianity expanded the public record
  - a. Apostolic ministries and martyrdom
  - b. Second and third century apologists and pastors
  - c. Innumerable leaders and speakers in the day of official standing in the old Roman empire

---

<sup>6</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ac 26.26.

- d. Dominant and central force in the many different realms of the west through the middle ages
  - e. Remarkable recovery of truth and expansion of Reformation and post Reformation
  - f. The Great Century of missions: 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - g. The continuing life of the church into the 21<sup>st</sup> century
3. Can scoffers point to failures and abuses during this period
- a. Yes, they can, but the failures don't negate the standard
  - b. The whole history is open to public scrutiny
  - c. Regardless of weakness and failure (at points) Christianity still exists
    - 1) It's book, the Bible, stands
    - 2) It's people continue to wait in faith for their Lord from heaven
    - 3) Their persisting presence provides evidence for the value of the preaching

Great business institutions build up a lot of good will and capital. The strength of the capital can make a business persist even after the energy and drive of the founders is long gone.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus, in his work, gained immense "spiritual capital" that persists in bearing fruit

- B. The public persistence of the church, based on the work of Christ demands a response
- 1. Paul turned to Agrippa, "do you believe the prophets? I know that you do" (27)
  - 2. The question put Agrippa on the spot: the public nature of Christianity demands a believing response
  - 3. I submit that today, the continuing public nature of the gospel and its work in the Christian church demands a believing response

## Conclusion:

### Proposition: Men ought to believe that which is very well known

It is true that some people, even in our culture don't "know" the basics of the Bible, but the truth of its record stands.

- The church continues to exist (problems and all)
- The impact of Christianity affects daily life: what year is it?  
... technically, it is *the year of our Lord (Anno Domini), 2022*
- Almost every country in the world uses the Gregorian Calendar (Christian):

"Today, the vast majority of countries use the Gregorian calendar as their sole civil calendar. The four countries which have not adopted the Gregorian calendar are Ethiopia (Ethiopian calendar), Nepal (Vikram Samvat and Nepal Sambat), Iran and Afghanistan (Solar Hijri calendar)."<sup>7</sup>

These things weren't done in a corner. Men ought to consider, investigate, and discover why these things are so.

If you aren't a Christian, you need a good reason to persist in unbelief.

"This has not been done in a corner."

---

<sup>7</sup> "Adoption of the Gregorian Calendar," in *Wikipedia*, June 1, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Adoption\\_of\\_the\\_Gregorian\\_calendar&oldid=1090898467](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Adoption_of_the_Gregorian_calendar&oldid=1090898467).