

Persuasive Preaching - Part 2

by Alistair Begg

Alistair Begg emphasizes the importance of clarity, authority, and urgency in persuasive preaching through the example of Paul's defense before Agrippa.

Duration: 1:04:46

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 1:15 - 2:6, Acts 25:24

Topics: "Preaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of both explanation and application in preaching the word of God. He highlights the need to lay down a foundation of biblical teaching before making practical applications. The speaker then discusses how Paul used explanation and interruption in his defense before Agrippa. He explains how Paul's monologue turned into a dialogue, leading to a rapid-fire interchange that was both brief and persuasive.

Transcript

Now, with our Bibles open, let's turn to Acts chapter 25, and I'm going to pick up and I'm going to read an extensive portion of Scripture. This, I know, is fairly unusual in America, actually, despite the fact that the Bible says that we should devote ourselves to the public reading of Scripture. Can I encourage you to take seriously the reading of the Bible? Let's be humble enough to acknowledge that oftentimes our faithful reading of the text will be under God far more useful than our attempts at expounding the text--especially if we read it carefully and clearly.

And some of us need to practice in private, reading out loud, because we don't read very well. And it's good for us to show our people not our reverence for the Bible, as it were, you know, as if it was some form of idolatry, but it conveys something of our absolute commitment to the text and trying to be servants of it. Now, I've set myself up dreadfully for a few missteps, but that's all right.

I'm happy to be put under your scrutiny in this respect as well. Acts chapter 25, I'm going to read from verse 23 all the way through to the end of 26. The next day Agrippa and Bernas came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking officers and the leading men of the city.

At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Festus said, King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man. The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.

I found he had done nothing deserving of death. But because he made his appeal to the emperor, I decided to send him to Rome. But I have nothing definite to write to his majesty about him.

Therefore, I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write, for I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him. Then Agrippa said to Paul, You have permission to speak for yourself. So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense.

King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you're well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. The Jews all know the way I've lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country and also in Jerusalem.

They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they're willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night.

O King, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests, I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. On one of these journeys, I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

About noon, O King, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun blazing around me and my companions. 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 gods. And then I asked, Who are you, Lord? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, the Lord replied.

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 of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles.

I am sending you to them 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. So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen--that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

At this point, Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul," he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied.

"What I am saying is true and reasonable. 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 corner.

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?' "I know you do.' Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?' Paul replied, "Short time or long, I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.' The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernas and those sitting with them. They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.' Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." Father, as we turn to the Bible, what we know not, teach us. What we have not, give us.

What we are not, make us. For your Son's sake. Amen.

Well, we return to this matter of preaching to the will, or as we sort of redefined it yesterday, the issue of persuasive preaching, or preaching that seeks to persuade. John Newton, in his day, recognizing the peculiar challenge that is involved in this, wrote to his colleagues as follows, We are not to be discouraged by the carelessness or obstinacy of those who know not what they do. We are aware of the difficulty, yea, the impossibility of succeeding in our endeavor to save the souls of our hearers, if we had only to depend upon our own arguments or earnestness.

We are not to reason but to obey. Our business is to deliver our message, and in our happier moments to water it with our prayers and our tears. When we have done this, we can do no more.

The events must be left with him in whose name we speak. We must not suppress or disguise what we are commanded to declare, nor willfully make any addition of our own to accommodate it to the taste or prejudice of our hearers. Like Ezekiel, we are commanded to preach and prophesy to dry bones, and he who sends us can cause the dry bones to live.

That's volume 4, page 89 of the works of John Newton. Every one of us who has been given the privilege of standing in this position recognizes the validity and the applicability of Newton's words. When we tried to open up this subject yesterday, we observed that there were three things in particular that we could identify that were the enemies of preaching that seeks to persuade.

They were confusion concerning our message, fear concerning the consequences of proclaiming the message, and complacency regarding the predicament of those who listen to the message. And as we go through this passage now this morning, Paul's defense before Agrippa, as Luke has wonderfully kept it for us, I hope that you will be as keen to see as I am whether the counterpoint of those three enemies is to be found in Paul's treatment before these individuals--namely, how much of his defense before Agrippa we might see to be marked by clarity, by authority, and by a sense of urgency. For if fear and confusion and complacency are the enemies of preaching that persuades, then clarity and authority and urgency are the friends.

Now, we've set ourselves a large task because there is much material, and I'm going to just take you inside, as it were, where I am, so that some of you who are asking, how do you do these things or what are you doing, even if it is only to learn by avoiding what I'm doing, you will learn something. But the first word that I have just written down in my notes here is background. I just simply wrote down the word background, so that I might make sure that I sketch in sufficient of the background--not too much, but enough--to bring along those for whom the encounter with Paul's defense before Agrippa hits them

completely cold.

Luke tells us--and we need to go back to chapter 24, which is not too far, but we need to go back to 24--to discover the fact that Paul had been accused of being a troublemaker. He'd been accused of being a troublemaker. Verse 5 of Acts 24, we have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world.

It's a bit of an outlandish claim, but there is significance to it. There is a significant amount of truth to it. The Roman governor Felix had heard the case without ever issuing a verdict.

Now, Luke tells us that he'd been hoping for a bride, perhaps, so that Paul might be discharged from prison. No bride was forthcoming. There's a quite stirring sermon that he and Drusilla received, sitting there in their adulterous relationship.

Paul gave them a little taste of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. Not exactly a politically correct sermon on the part of someone that was hoping, perhaps, to get an early discharge from his bondage. How strange a man is this apostle! He then left Paul in custody, and after a couple of years, there was a transition in leadership, and Festus takes over as the governor.

Festus is quickly out of his depth. Paul makes his appeal to Caesar rather than go back to Jerusalem, as Festus was urging him to do, and as a result, Festus is, frankly, looking for some way that he can put together the necessary documentation in order to send this fellow, who is in his custody, on to Caesar as he has requested. And he must have said to himself, when the news came that the Jewish king and his wife were going to be coming by to pay their respects, he must have said to himself, This is terrific! I'll be able to use this as an opportunity to get rid of this Paul character and perhaps get on to life in a more settled way.

Now, what happens is that as Festus then, welcoming the king, begins to give his report--and we're now around verse 14 or so, in chapter 25--when Agrippa and Bernas arrive at Caesarea to pay their respects--that's verse 13--because they're there for a few days, Festus seizes the opportunity to discuss the case with the king. That's what Luke tells us. And you'll see there, if your Bible is open before you, he says, There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner.

It's a quite dismissive sort of way to refer to it, isn't it? There is a man here. There are a number of men here. And in case I forget to say this, the reason that struck me is because when the whole thing ends at the end of chapter 26, notice the non-deferential way in which both the people talk to one another on the way out after Paul's defense.

This man is not doing anything. This man could have been set free. Doesn't he have a name? Can you refer to him by his name? There is a man here whom Felix left behind.

He's down here. He's a complete nuisance to me, and I wonder if I can't have you help me with him. And as he recounts the circumstances between verse 14 and 21 and 22, Agrippa says that he's actually very interested in this.

And he would quite like a chance to hear this man--verse 22--for myself. Let's get this man up here and see what this man is on about. This man, of course, being God's man.

Now, when you are God's man, they don't always give you deference, do they? Especially when you're faced by circumstances that are daunting. And so what we discover is that a large door of opportunity is about to swing open two ways. It opens on the one side to Agrippa, who is about to hear a quite striking and wonderful representation of the transforming power of Jesus in the life of the apostle Paul and in the lives of others.

And the door that opens for Agrippa to hear is the door that opens for Paul to preach. Now, yesterday in our seminar that some of us shared in, there were some questions regarding how do you deal with preaching through narrative, especially where there are long chunks of it. And the answer is, essentially, carefully, hopefully prayerfully, and hopefully successfully.

But I went to check, because we had done work in Acts some years ago in 2005--and this, again, is just for those of you who are wondering about things--when I went back and checked, I discovered that the material that I'm trying to work through now, in one fell swoop, I took three sermons on in October of 2005. I preached from verses 1 to 15, and then I preached a sermon on verses 16, 17, and 18. And if you look at those verses, you would understand why there would be a purposeful pause there.

And then I went from 19 through to 32. I've chosen to do this this morning because I think moving quickly is helpful to us, and we won't get bogged down. At least, I hope we won't get bogged down.

All right? So, background. That's all I'm saying about background. Secondly, I wrote down in my notes, consider the scene.

Consider the scene. Or, if you like, we move from the background to the foreground. And what do we have in the foreground? Well, we have this introduction of a drama which unfolds in the presence of Paul and the others.

The next day, verse 23, Agrippa and Bernas came with Great Pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking officers and the leading men of the city. I am such a naughty soul that I've been thinking all week about their son, who's mentioned here in the same verse. His name is Great Pomp.

And they came with Great Pomp. And ever since I thought of their little boy as Great Pomp, I've been unable to get it out of my mind. It's just horribly unhelpful.

But anyway, you understand, the word here in Greek is phantasia. It gives us our word fantastic. It's an indication of the pageantry, of the profile of these individuals.

It would be some great movement that took place. They weren't slipping in through the side doors, as it were. They would be arriving with all their weight of glory and significance.

And if it was Malcolm Sargent that wrote the tune, I can't remember, but then it would be just like a great high school graduation, you know. Here they come. Oh, look, there's Agrippa.

Is that his wife? Yes. Who's the fat guy behind him? Oh, I don't know, one of the officials. Oh, good.

The Herods are here. The Herods are here. What a motley, immoral, despicable crew this man who processes in had as his great-grandfather--the one who was responsible for the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem--had as his grandfather the one who beheaded John the Baptist.

Had as his father the one who killed the apostle James and died a sorry, despicable death on account of his blasphemy. Now, we needn't tar this individual with all that has gone before. Nevertheless, it's not exactly what you would call a nice family background.

Alas--now, this is the American side of me, which is at least a third, if not moving to a half--alas, the sorry tales that come from stories of royalty would seem in all times and in all places. Whenever individuals take to themselves a prerogative that is not theirs to enjoy, there seems to be no limit to what they feel able to say or to do. Now, the scene is set, isn't it? And Luke, I think, makes it clear to us the distinction.

Great pomp and circumstance, the high-ranking officers, the leading men of the city, and then notice the sentence, At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. So it's not as if you don't get the impression that they were all there, and then at the final thing, the preacher, he came down the aisle, as it were, in the central procession, and here comes the one who's going to preach today. No.

It is far more likely that he came shuffling in from the side like this--brought in, prodded in, put in the situation, in front of all of this grandeur, in front of all of this apparent might, in front of all of this great significance. In other words, there is a sense in which in this scene you have a picture of the church before the world. Because an observer would look at this and say, Where is power to be found in this scene? Anybody would be forgiven for saying, Well, clearly it must be in all of this pageantry.

Clearly it must be with the king and the throne and Bernas and the leading officials and everything. There can be nothing of power in this poor character, wherever they've dragged him up from, whatever his deal is. Now, the church actually has seemed to prosper always in church history when it has come, as it were, manacled before the authority and power and majesty of the state.

That's why in our church history classes we always had to debate the issue whether the conversion of Constantine was a plus or a minus for the fledgling church. And when some years ago I went to China for the first time and met with people from the underground church and spoke to them about the nature of what was going on, they were absolutely clear that despite all of the sadness that attached to the nature of the cultural revolution, they saw in their very weakness the seeds of that which has mushroomed to a vibrant church in China today. It is a reminder in passing--and I just made a note of this in my notes just to encourage myself--Isaiah 40, 23, I put, Note bene.

He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of the world to nothing. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of the world to nothing. Check with Nebuchadnezzar.

Check with Darius. Check your Bible. Now, let's move as quickly as we can through the first eighteen verses of chapter 26.

Notice the progression as Luke has given it to us. In verse 22 of the previous chapter--that's 25--after Festus has given his little preamble, Agrippus said, I would like to hear this man for myself. The end of verse 22, Tomorrow you will hear him.

Then you go to verse 23, The next day, Festus said. Okay? I'd like to hear this man for myself. Tomorrow you will hear him.

The next day, Festus said. And it's just imagination. It's conjecture on my part, but I can imagine the king breaking into Festus' speech towards the end of chapter 25 and saying to Festus, I said I wanted to hear him.

I heard you yesterday. I don't want to hear you again today. And then he says to Paul, verse 1 of 26, You have permission to speak for yourself.

And then, in the little detail that you would expect from someone as punctilious as Luke in his writing, So Paul motioned with his hand. It has a sort of Shakespearean notion to it, doesn't it? What did he do? I don't know. Anyway, he most said, Okay, or, like, Gotcha, here we go.

I don't know what he did, but he motioned with his hand and simultaneously began his defense. Now, we want to move through this quickly. But first of all, he said, I want to tell you, King, that frankly, I was a religious prodigy.

I was a religious prodigy. I was the LeBron James of Phariseeism. In the same way that somebody grows up and becomes a sporting legacy in a community, I actually was that in a religious framework.

For whatever reason, my background, my training, my family life, and everything produced in me that which marked me out. People know. Who else could say, The Jews know how I have lived ever since I was a child.

In other words, there was something about his upbringing that marked him out, that from the beginning of life in my own country and also in Jerusalem, and they've known me for a long time, and they can testify concerning these things. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers. My hope in what God has promised our fathers.

Now, when we're reading and studying our Bibles, we have to determine, especially moving through narrative, at what point we're going to pause. And I would suggest to you that when we come to a word like this, to a phrase like this, that it is occasion for us to stop. Not to stop and bury ourselves, but to stop long enough to make sure that we understand what it is that Paul is saying, so that we might in turn tell our congregations why it is important.

It's not good for us to stop and intrigue our conversations with material that just tickles their fancy or intrigues them and is really largely unimportant. But in a circumstance like this, this is important. And I want to tell you why it's important and prove my point.

This, he says, is because of the hope that I am in this predicament. Go back to chapter 23 and verse 6. He is before the Sanhedrin. Some of the people are Sadducees, some of the people are Pharisees.

He says in verse 6b, My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial--now, here we go--because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead. That's why I'm on trial.

Chapter 24, verse 15. Well, back up to partway through 14, I believe everything that agrees with the law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. And this goes all the way to the end of Acts, so that in chapter 28--and this will be my last course reference on this--but in Acts 28, where he has the people in the proximity of his locale, he says in verse 20, For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you--and here we go again--it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.

There is a dramatic irony in this, and he is counting on the fact that because Agrippa is Jewish, he will sense something of the incongruity of it. Why would I be here, in custody, appealing to Caesar, making my defense before you, on account of a hope which has been shared throughout the years by our people

Israel? In other words, this hope--that is, the certainty of a reality not yet experienced--this hope was the conviction among the people of Israel that God would one day come and deliver his people in much the same way that he had done for his people when they were in the bondage of Egypt, and that when he did so, he would raise up a banner of salvation out of the house of David. Now, if you want a cross-reference, then read Zechariah's song at the end of Luke chapter 1, and you will find that it is that very phraseology which is there on the lips of Zechariah.

And Zechariah sings this song in light of the hope of Israel. For in this child Jesus, here we have the light that lightens our people Israel, the hope of the Gentiles that is to come. And it was this hope which gave life, which gave meaning, which gave purpose to all of the morning and evening services, all of the morning-evening sacrifices, all of the prayers of the twelve tribes--verse 7 of 26--namely, the nation in its totality.

It was the hope of Israel which allowed them to hang on. Because they were looking, they were watching, they were waiting. The lines were running all the way through from the prophets, and they looked for a day when the one would come who would embody all of these dimensions--a prophet who would speak to their ignorance, a priest who would bear all of their iniquities, a king who would reign and rule and subdue all of their rebellion.

And now, says Paul, I want you to know that the reason I'm here before you, the issue is not the resurrection, because we all believe in the resurrection, apart from the Sadducees. But we all believe that there is a resurrection. No, the reason that I'm before you in this way is because I'm here to speak concerning the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

It's very interesting--and this is parenthetical, I didn't plan to say this--but isn't it interesting that we can have these conversations with people about reincarnation, the idea of life going on on the grave, and folks will talk to us at great length and explore the possibilities, right up until the point where you say, Well, have you ever really considered that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, that he is the person he claimed? Oh, no, I couldn't possibly believe that. No, no. No, no, no, no, no.

No. Oh, I see. All right.

So you don't really have a problem with the idea of resurrection, or you would like reincarnation, you don't like the idea of incarnation--I guess it's only a consonant and a vowel, but seems to be pretty important. I mean, that happens all the time, doesn't it? You would almost think that the God of this age had blinded the minds of people so that they could not, would not, see the light of the glory of Christ in the gospel. Now, the transition that he makes--that is, Paul--is very interesting.

It's almost as if he goes all the way up to verse 8 with this rhetorical question, Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? And then maybe a little bell went off in the back of his head, and he said, Wait a minute. Maybe I should just backpedal for just a moment. And so he says, Well, let me be fair.

I mean, let's be fair about things. Verse 9, I actually was convinced that I ought to do everything possible to do down this Jesus of Nazareth, oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And so, in verses 9, 10, and 11, he outlines his era of opposition and persecution.

In verses 12-18, he then tells the of God's intervention. So he says, I'm here because of the hope of Israel. Resurrection we believe in.

I know you have a problem with what I'm saying about Jesus. I can actually understand that, because I used to feel that way about Jesus. There's something tremendously disarming about that in our interpersonal relationships, in our dialoguing with people at Starbucks and stuff.

Some of us make a dreadful hash of it by sort of thrashing our way through to verse 8, you know. Why do you think it's so incredible that people would raise the dead, you silly-looking, pagan, clown person? Have a nice day! You know. No, he's not asking it in that way.

He says, We've agreed on this, haven't we? And furthermore, I didn't always feel this way. I was opposed to Jesus. I was a persecutor of those who loved Jesus.

And then, anticipating what's going on in the mind of his listeners, he says, And I want to tell you why it is that I am no longer that. Because clearly I'm no longer that. That's why I'm standing before you, to give my defense.

And then he tells the story of God's intervention in his life. And Paul's monologue is about to become a dialogue. Suddenly it's going to move forward--brief, pointed, arresting, and persuasive.

A rapid-fire interchange is about to break the bounds of propriety. He has laid out the information. You know it there, you see it there.

It's not my purpose to stay with it there. And then he gets to his so what in verse 19. The reason that some of us never make much of a connection with our listeners is because we do not get to the so what.

The reason why some of us never actually teach the Bible is because we start with the so what, and we never get to the Bible. It is the very didactic material that gives significance to the so what, so that unless we are prepared to do what is necessary, as he does, to lay down, if you like, the foundation, then we never have a basis on which to make application. Explanation Now, what I want to do is summarize the balance of this passage under a number of words.

And I'd tell you what they are. If they're helpful, use them. If they're not, just discard them.

First of all, the word is explanation, that I wrote in my notes. I just wrote down explanation, because what he's really doing is he's giving Agrippa here a word of explanation concerning what happened in relationship to these things. Since it is the word explanation, I then started to think in terms of the journalist questions--the who, what, why, when, where, and so on--in order that I might be able to understand the explanation myself.

And so, here's his explanation. Why is it that you are preaching? Sorry, I should have told you that I'm jumping from so then at the very beginning of 19 down to the verb preached, you know, deep down in verse 20. So then I preached.

So then I preached. I was once this, I'm now this, because of the hope of Israel. I actually used to oppose it.

I was a bad act. But now I began to preach. Why? Why? Well, the answer he has already given.

Because I was sent, because I was appointed. Back up in verse 17. The word of God to him was, I will rescue you from your own people, from the Gentiles.

I am sending you to them. I am sending you to them. It's interesting, because it's the same phraseology that you find--not the same Greek terminology, but the same phraseology, as translated into English--that you find in John chapter 20, where Jesus commissions his apostles to go out, and he says to them, I am sending you.

I am sending you. And now he lays hold on this one as an apostle, untimely born, arrests him, sets him on his feet, and gives him the same divine commission. I am sending you.

So if you're wondering, Agrippa, why I'm doing this, why I'm preaching, that's the answer. Where have you been doing this? Where have you been doing this? Well, I'm glad you asked. Verse 20.

I started in Damascus. I've been doing it in Jerusalem, and then in Judea, and also amongst the Gentiles. To Lamont.

Everywhere. Everywhere. If I have such a great message, why would I localize it? Everywhere I have the opportunity.

Well, what is this message that you're preaching? I'm glad you asked that as well. Well, of course, this is not really happening as a dialogue. You understand, this is an invention, on my part, in order to try and get at it.

And I want to show you that he masterfully three times inserts the gospel into what he's doing. So, first of all, in verse 18, God said, I'm sending you to them. And he takes the opportunity to tell Agrippa what he was sending him to do--to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins in a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

It's pretty clever, isn't it? He didn't just say, Why are you doing this? Well, because I was I'm a preacher now. Mm-hmm. No, he said, He actually sent me to this, to this, to this, to this.

And Agrippa's not nuts. He understands what's happening. Everybody understands this.

If he sent you to proclaim forgiveness, I wonder, am I forgiven? If he sent you to turn people from darkness to light, I wonder, do I live in darkness, or do I live in light? If there is a place for those who are being set apart to God, who are sanctified through faith in Jesus, I wonder, does that describe me? We don't have to constantly, in our preaching, join the dots for people. We need to credit them with some ability to process the information as it is conveyed to them. And Paul does this.

Look how he comes to it again in verse 20. He says, answering the question, Where? The unasked question, Where? Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, and the Gentiles. Also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

And then in verse 23, he does it again. I'm not saying things beyond the prophets. Only what Moses said would happen.

And here we go! That the Christ, the Messiah, would suffer, and as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles. Now, what Paul is doing there is he's making it

clear--and he affirms this by his own words--that he is not before Agrippa and Bernas and all of these people on this occasion because he has come up with some kind of newfangled message, because he has somehow disengaged from the Judaism of his roots, because he has somehow or another developed a whole newfangled concept, and that's why the Jewish people are on his case. No! He says, This is not anything that is novel.

All that I am saying, you can discover, is in keeping with the prophets. In other words, he was conveying basic Christianity. What is it that you're doing? Well, I'm preaching.

Why are you doing this? Because God asked me to. Where are you doing it? Everywhere I get a chance. What's involved? Repentance, forgiveness of sins, faith in Jesus Christ.

And to whom do you want to take this message? Well, I want to take it to everyone, both to small and great alike. Verse 22, I have had God's help to this very day, and I stand here and testify to small and great alike. You can just imagine.

These folks, they're not deaf. They're processing the information. Do you remember, is it in the biography of Martin Lloyd-Jones in one of the two volumes, or is it in Preaching and Preachers? I can't remember, where we have the story of him going to speak at Cambridge University.

And he speaks at KICU, at the Cambridge Christian Union. And then in the evening, he's invited home to one of the local evangelical Anglican ministers, who has convened a meeting in his home as a sort of after-meeting for some of the university students to come along and bring their friends so that they can have a dialogue with Martin Lloyd-Jones. They had been at the service, they'd listened to him preach, and now they come home.

And the record states that one of the early questions came from one of these young Cambridge boys. And essentially, he said to the doctor, he said, I listened to you preach this evening, and I can see how that kind of message would be useful to some of the farmers around here in Cambridgeshire, some of the workers of the land, but I fail to see how it's relevant to academics and intellectuals like myself and my colleagues. And Lloyd-Jones looked at him, and he said, Well, the last time I checked, Cambridge university students were made of the same dull clay as the farmworkers in the fields.

The message is the same to small and great alike, because the need is the same for small and great alike. Men and women are lost. Men and women are without God and without hope in the world.

The way in which they deal with that, disguise that, explain it, differs in terms of their socioeconomic environment, their intellectual capacity, and so what. But the Bible actually says that there is only one message. It's the message that Paul was proclaiming.

And so he says it is for great and small alike. Well, at that point, we have the interruption. That's the second word I wrote down.

I wrote explanation, and then I wrote interruption. Interruption comes in verse 24. It's not difficult to get that as a point, is it? After all, the verb is right there in English in the NIV.

At this point, festus interrupted. Oh, perhaps I'll write in my notes, interruption. There you go.

There's a good one for you, Alistair. At this point, Festus interrupted. Don't let's try and make it more complicated than it is.

We don't know whether Festus was beginning to feel the impact of this. Maybe he was getting a little hot under his collar. Maybe he was wriggling around in his seat.

We don't know what it was. Maybe he was regretting the opportunity that he had provided for Agrippa to do this and for Paul to speak. Maybe he felt that Agrippa would be getting uncomfortable, therefore he was the host, therefore he would have been uncomfortable.

Who knows? But apparently he was sufficiently disrupted in his spirit to start shouting out in the middle of his defense. Because you will notice that he shouted. He shouted.

In other words, he didn't clear his throat and wait for an opportunity in the silence, say, "Excuse me, just for a moment." No, no. He shouted out, "You know what, Paul? You are out of your mind. You're off your rocker.

You're too clever for your own good." Now, I don't know how much open-air preaching you've done, but I did quite a lot in Scotland. And indeed, I recommend it to you. Because there's nothing like standing out at the end of Buchanan Street and trying to arrest a crowd to find out whether you are anywhere close to useful in public proclamation.

Because the Glaswegians will cut you very little slack, and Edinburgh is even worse. So when somebody arrests the situation, calls out in the middle of your proclamation, what are you going to do? Well, this is what Paul did, and he did it very nicely, didn't he? Because here comes the interruption, and here comes verse 25, the response. How does he handle it? Three words.

Number one, respectfully. Respectfully. I am not insane.

Most excellent Festus! Now, we've got to assume that he's not playing a game here. He's not being a funny guy. He's giving credit where credit is due.

He recognizes--and when you think about the way he writes the book of Romans, we must assume that he's true to his own proclamation, true to his own writing, that we have respect for those who are in authority over us, that we honor God, we honor the King, and so on. We're not going to undermine it. So here is this person in a position of authority.

He shouts out. He says, You're off your rocker, Paul. You say, Well, actually, most excellent Festus.

No. He handles it respectfully. He handles it candidly.

Candidly. I am not insane. And what I'm actually saying is true, and it's reasonable.

It's true and reasonable. That would be a big start for many of our sermons, wouldn't it, if we could just say that? Half the time when people shout out, we couldn't possibly answer in that way, because it might be true, but it's really quite irrational. Respectfully, candidly, and skillfully.

Skillfully. Now, remember, he has a legal background as well. He's not caught off guard by this kind of thing.

He's been well-trained. And you'll notice what he does here is he divides to conquer. He divides to conquer.

I'm not insane, most excellent felix. Paul replied. What I'm saying is true and reasonable.

Now, here we go. The King--he might have motioned again with his hand. The King, who actually asked me the question, festus, and to whom I'm speaking right now, please don't interrupt--the King is familiar with this stuff.

He's familiar with this. And I can speak freely to him, inference being, but clearly not to you, most excellent festus. And furthermore, none of this will have escaped the King's notice, because I'm not working in a clandestine subterfuge operation.

That's what the people are accusing him of, but that's what they themselves are guilty of--squirreling around and doing things secretly and so on. No, this has not been done in a corner. This is out in the open.

This is not these people that Tom Cruise is into, whatever you call those guys. Scientologists! You're in Santa Barbara or Fort Lauderdale, you see these people all the time. And the places they take you--I couldn't ever go in there, I'm too afraid--but they take you, you go in a place, and there's never anything nice in the window.

And then, apparently, it gets a little darker the further they go in, and then they--I don't know what they do--they strap you up to a machine and figure you out, and you'll never be the same again. But there's nothing open about it. You can't really get an answer to the question.

Nobody speaks honestly and openly about it. But Christianity is never done in a corner. Christianity is light.

Christianity is proclamation. Christianity is openness. And Paul is able to say, Listen, I'm not insane.

It's true, and it's reasonable. The king's familiar with it, and frankly, he knows because everybody knows. Explanation, an interruption, and then the application.

And then the application. Now, I think you'll agree that this is quite wonderful. Verse 27.

Often when I read my Bible, especially in dialogue like this, you just wish you had a tape recording of it, don't you? You wish you could hear the tone of voice. You wish you could hear the tone of voice. Of course, everybody hears tone of voice in their own sort of framework.

So, I mean, if you're here from England, you know, you think it reads like this, King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do. And I don't think it was like that at all, frankly. But that's OK.

You can have that for yourself. If you came from Glasgow, Hey, King, you believe the prophets, don't you? I know you do. I know you do.

Uh-huh. I don't know how he said it, but I'll tell you what, he disarmed him. He disarmed him.

What a beautiful thrust! What a reach for the little dagger, you know! Not the huge two-handed sword. He doesn't need that here. Doesn't need to come slashing and crashing around.

He's done all the work so far. He's laid down the thing. He's able to move forward now.

And he looks the king in the eye, and he does what you're not allowed to do in these proceedings--namely, address the person in authority yourself. The prisoner does not speak to the judge. And here he breaks the bounds of propriety, presumably only because of the passion that fills him, only because of the longing that he feels, only because of the urgency with which he comes to the task.

Surely he must have said to himself, when they came down into wherever his dwelling was, when they roused him from his bed, and they said to him, Now Agrippa and Bernice are here, and the officials and everybody else, and they want you to give an apologia for your faith in Jesus Christ. And he must have said, Lord Jesus Christ, this is a great opportunity. This is probably my only opportunity.

Don't let me mess this up. And if I get the slightest chance to look him in the eye, help me to take it right to the hoop, as it were. And so here it comes.

And he must have said to himself, It's now or never. King Agrippa. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? And then this endearing nudge.

It is an endearing nudge. Oh, hey, I know you do. There's something wonderful about that little line to me.

I know you do. He's not putting words in the king's mouth. He is actually wooing him.

He is bringing him onto his side with him. He is not setting up an ongoing conflict between the two of them. He's saying, as he looks into his eyes, when we think of our backgrounds, checkered as they may be, we come out of the same stock.

We are the ones who are looking for the hope of Israel. We are the ones who are the recipients of the prophet's expectation. And now we go over the dialogue.

Agrippa must have caught himself off guard. Now he's speaking to the prisoner. He had every legitimate right to say, Take the fellow out.

He doesn't speak to me like that. And then Agrippa said to Paul, You know, if you don't know what to do when you're asked a question, ask a question in reply, right? You see it on Capitol Hill every day when the CNN are out there, and so what about the such-and-such? Well, what about the such-and-such? Oh, well, finally somebody answer a question, would you? Then Agrippa said, Do you actually think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian? Now, I know that that text is variously translated, but just let's leave it as it sits for now. Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian? Now, here, in Paul's reply, is the embodiment of what we looked at yesterday in 2 Corinthians 5.20. How can he go ahead except in the conviction that God makes his appeal through him? We are ambassadors of Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us.

Brethren, resolve now, if you've bottled this in the past, not to equivocate in these moments. It's not about you, it's not about me. We may be the vehicle, the instrument in that moment of opportunity, but our sense of authority, our sense of boldness does not have to do with our personality, with our training, with our notoriety, with our background, but with our conviction that although our lips may falter, God makes his appeal through us.

Otherwise, what the devil are we doing? What are we actually doing? Giving speeches? God making his appeal, deigning to consecrate his purposes to the lips of mere mortals. So comes his reply, I don't know about a short time or a long time, King, but I pray God--this is my earnest, passionate longing--that not

only you--you can imagine him looking him now straight in the eye--not only you, but all who today are listening to me. And again, now, he moves his gaze around, whatever the scene is, in the chamber, and he looks at these people--Bernas and the high-ranking officials and the people who had come in so secure in their majesty and in their might and in their authority to listen to some poor, off-scouring piece of humanity who's been dragged up out of his impoverished circumstances to speak at the king's bidding, as if somehow or another they had employed him to fill in a few hours that they had no idea what they were going to do with.

And now they find themselves under the framework of his passionate gaze. I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me may become today. Today! Yeah, today! He actually doesn't even do some of our little stuff.

Oh, I'd like you to go away and think about this. Thank you for asking the question. I've never had a king ask me that question before.

It's really super. And no, he said, Yeah, actually, now you mention it. Yeah, I long that you would become today as I am.

And then, ironically, he said, Of course, except for these. Except for these. But you see, it was these that gave him the very platform in order to make his appeal.

No, I think he was winsome. I think he was bold. I think he was skillful.

I think he was courageous. I think he was kind. And you will notice the conclusion.

Very abrupt, isn't it? Apparently so, verse 30. The king rose. The king rose.

Did he stand up slowly? I don't know. Did he jump up? But when you're in a position of leadership like that, your response has an impact on those around you. And notice what the text says.

The king rose, and with him, the governor and Burnas and those sitting with them. All rise. All rise.

The king is now leaving. I guess that's over. The opportunity is now about to close for each one who was there underneath the instruction of Paul.

One of the great fun parts of heaven is going to be to discover people of whom we have no record in the Bible who actually came to faith in Christ as a result of these kind of things. I mean, don't you think it'll be wonderful? You go, and somebody comes up, and you get in the chat with them, and you're just having a celestial cup of coffee or whatever it is, and you say, So, tell me your story. You say, Would you ever remember the thing that Luke did in Acts 26? You know, the thing with Agrippa? Yeah, I remember that.

I tried to preach on that. It was no good, but I tried my best. And I was one of the royal dignitaries.

You were? Yeah. I mean, the king, he was out the door like a bolt of lightning. He was gone.

He couldn't stand it. But there were a few of us. Actually, we got together, and we started to study the prophets.

And the more we studied the prophets, we realized that what Paul was actually saying about the hope of Israel was true, and that Jesus Christ was none other than the Messiah and the Savior, and he became

our Lord and our King and our Friend, and we served him. Well, we must stop. One of the commentaries that I looked at--and this is one reason why you have to be careful with commentaries if you're not thinking.

You may just dish this stuff out. But if you read the last two sentences there, they left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment. And Agrippa said to Festus, This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

Okay? That doesn't sound like much of a conversation to me, does it? It sounds like the average thing you get in the hallway with people after services. I mean, you might want them to be going around going, Oh, I must repent of my sins and trust, but half the time they're going, Are you going to Arby's, or were you going to meet your wife over at McDonald's? I mean, it's one of the most disheartening things that you could ever do. That's why I go and run away and hide and bury my head under blankets and stuff, so that I can't hear the implications of it.

But this is what the commentator says. He says, The imperfect tense, *elalun*, is the word here, while they were talking. *Elalun*.

The imperfect tense describes the eager conversation of the dignitaries about Paul's wonderful speech. What? Where did you get that? I'm reading the Bible as well. The imperfect tense describes the eager conversation of the dignitaries about Paul's wonderful speech.

No, it doesn't. I don't think it does. I'll tell you what I think it is.

If they thought for much longer about the nature of what he'd said, they would either have to rail against it or they would have to bow down before it. So instead of facing it head-on, they started to talk about legal technicalities to one another. You know, he actually didn't need to be here.

He could have gone to Caesar. You see, he had the opportunity. He had the opportunity to rise up and follow Christ, and apparently he rose up and went on his own way.

We do have to pray before we preach, while we preach, and after we preach that in those tender moments, in those doors of opportunity, that people might come to trust in Christ. If I had more time, I would tell you how I would finish this address if I were preaching it just to a regular congregation. But with respect to you and to everyone else, let's just stop.

Let us pray. God our Father, we thank you that you are the God who comes in underneath the radar of rebellious sinners like Saul of Tarsus, kicking and screaming and struggling. He discovers that you are Lord and King and bows before you, that you continue to take the most unlikely individuals and thrust them forward into your service.

And we pray for your help. We earnestly pray that you will help us, Lord, to be faithfully, thoroughly dependent upon your Spirit, earnestly keen not to fiddle with the text but to set it forward, and passionately committed to urging those who are under the sound of our voices to hear God's appeal to them, so that as from God we might say to them, we implore you on Christ's behalf, receive the reconciliation that in his atoning death he has made provision of. Lord, we don't know the end of the story, actually, in Agrippa's life.

But we do pray that in our congregations to which we return, that instead of people rising up from their seats, standing up and walking away, to continue to worship the substitute gods of money and sex and power and influence, that as a result of your amazing grace they may stand up amazed before the presence and majesty and saving power of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/18/SID18981.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/alistair-begg/persuasive-preaching-part-2/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net