

2008-04-05

Acts 25:26

Get a Grip Agrippa

Jerry Arnold

Let's pray. "Loving Father in Heaven, people have gathered here. Some have come for no better reason than they had nothing else to do. Others have come hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Lord You know we are here for a reason. This is a Devine appointment. And I am praying that You will be the One who teaches us through Your Word and that each one of us will hear the vary words we are to hear, we'll think the very thoughts we are to think and experience the very emotions You want us to experience. Lord I pray You will be so powerful in our midst that our hearts will be changed by You. We pray for miracles, and we ask this in Jesus Name, Amen."

They moved across the street from us. We lived on a corner, they moved into the house on the corner across from us. Two boys, three girls, one of the boys named Dave was my age at least. He was about a year older, but we were in the same class. And I was probably in the sixth grade when they moved there and we became acquainted. And there were a number of boys that lived in the house on the other corner. And we all ran around together. It didn't take long before we realized that Dave was the new leader. He was the new boss if you will. He was stronger than the rest of us. He was more aggressive than the rest of us. In fact, he really was a bully. And pretty much, we were afraid of him.

Now I remember as a young boy watching this whole thing take place, watching how he bullied my friends, and being bullied myself, and thinking about how I didn't like that. It didn't feel good. It made me feel like less of a person. And all those John Wayne moves that I had watched with my Dad and all those influences were teaching me that you know, you have to stand up to the bully. I knew someday, somehow, I would have to stand up to this guy. My Dad had taught me clearly his philosophy of life regarding that, and it was this. "Jerry, I don't want you to get into a fight. But if you do, I don't want you to lose." "Okay!"

Well, I knew I would have to stand up to this guy at some point. I didn't know the passage at the time, but I've read it since. It says, "A wise man sees trouble coming and prepares for it." And I prepared. I started doing pushups and sit-ups, I was lifting weights. I was a thin person. I was six feet tall already by that age, but I hadn't filled out. No comments, by the way. And so every ounce, every pound was hard earned. And by the time I was in the ninth grade, this had gone on for a number of years, this tension. And when it came to the ninth grade, it got really bad because he was interested in the same girl I was interested in. Her name was Marcia. And the tension was increasing. I read all I could about boxing, and I started practicing boxing. I would stand in the bathroom upstairs with the mirror and I would practice punching into the mirror. I broke the mirror one time, got a little too close.

Pushups, sit-ups, weighting, knowing the time was going to come when I would have to face this bully, and I would have to make a decision. And that decision would have a lot to say about who I was and what I was all about. It happened, it was spring time. Probably about a month left in school of my ninth grade year. Freshman in High School, it was lunch time, all the freshmen were down in the freshmen wing and we were carrying on during lunch hour. We had about fifteen minutes before Algebra one started. Phil was there. Phil was this kid that had

moved to our city, our little town I should say, about three years before. His father was a minister. Phil was a real gangly skinny kid, walked with a limp. He had been crippled somehow; I don't know what it caused it. But Dave, the bully, had gone up to Phil, grabbed Phil's belt. Pulled it right out of Phil's pants and was whipping his lags as Phil was dancing around and laughing and carrying on which was his coping mechanism.

I didn't like it. And I said something to Dave. His last name was Moe. I said, "Knock it off Moe." Well, he came to me and faced me face to face. And I don't know where you grew up, what you did when you were a young boy, but there in Northern Michigan, often times when there was a tension between guys, and before it ended up being a complete fight, we would kind of start wrestling, but it would be like hand wrestling. And we had each other's hands like this, and the goal was to bend the wrist back of the other person. Down here, or up there, or anyway, until they were "ouch, ouch" and then you were winner, you know. You were stronger than them. So we were in this death grip. And I am looking at him. I am a little taller than him, but he is stockier and he is stronger than me.

I am not exaggerating when I tell you, half the High School boys were afraid of him. We were freshmen, I am talking juniors and seniors were afraid of this guy. And we were in this death grip like this, and you know, he had no idea how many pushups I'd been doing, or sit-ups or anything. I didn't advertise that. But he couldn't bend my wrist back, and he said, "You know what Arnold, I am not going to stand here and hold hands with you." He let go and he slapped me. When he slapped me, he knocked my glasses off. Now I got glasses when I was in the sixth grade. And to be honest with you, I've hated glasses ever since. I don't like wearing glasses, I'd wear contacts, but I can't see very well with contacts because of something about my eyes. And the problem with glasses was my Dad was a state policeman. He didn't earn a whole lot of money. Mother didn't work outside of the home. There were five children and a dog, one car. You know, we were struggling to get by.

And I was real active in sports. And I didn't like glasses because when you get hit in the side here, oh, my nose was always bleeding, and/or my glasses were breaking. And I was, just to be honest with you; I was tired of hearing my Mom's lectures about broken glasses and what they cost and all that kind of stuff. And when my glasses went flying off my head and hit the concrete floor, I knew I had to make a decision. Time had come. And I knew whatever decision I made, it couldn't be halfhearted. I had to make a decision. I'll not go into a lot of detail, though I'd like to. I'll just use one phrase that my friend described it as. He said, "Jerry, when you started hitting him, it looked like a windmill in a hurricane." I don't know how long it lasted, but they had to pull me off him, he was down on the ground. And I learned an important lesson that day. There is never a victory without a decision. I made a decision, and I put every ounce of my energy into that decision. And the end result was a victory.

I'd like to study that with you today. Please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 24. By the way, if some of you are troubled by that story, I will remind you of Ecclesiastes chapter 3, "There is a time for war..." and of David and Goliath, and all our Bible heroes. Somebody fought somebody. And if you are pacifist and you want to complain to me, I'll just remind you before you do, I am not a pacifist. It might be a dangerous thing to do. Acts 24 verse 27: "After two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound." We studied

about Felix last week, *Felix the Cad*. We went all through chapter 24 and I would recommend you pick up a sermon tape, a copy of it either on a tape or CD. And that will give you some background to Paul's trial and what is happening. But I just wanted to introduce to you a new fellow. His name is Porcius Festus.

Festus became a governor of Judea. Now Festus - there is not much known about him. The authors don't have much to say about him. Apparently he was a fairly quiet fellow because the historians barely mention his name. He lasted about two years and he died. And that's it. That's about what we know of him. He followed Felix and two years later he died. Now Paul is going to be mentioned in chapter 25 verses 1-6. Let's read it.

"When Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem." By the way, Jerusalem is always up in the Bible. And when you leave Jerusalem you go down. When you come to Jerusalem you go up. "Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him..." Paul has been in jail for two years at this time. "And they ask a favor against him that he would summon him to Jerusalem - while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him." Now they didn't tell him that part of it.

"But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly. 'Therefore,' he said, 'let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.' And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought." So Paul is on trial again, this time by Festus. And the Jewish leaders are brought in to court there at Caesarea, and given an opportunity against Paul.

Well, they'd have the same tired old accusations none of which they can prove. And Paul recognizes, "this is not going anywhere" and Festus is going to ask him a question in verse 9. "But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?" Now Paul knows what's up. Paul knows that they'll seek to kill him along the way. He's not about to go to Jerusalem. So Paul said in verse 10, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I've done no wrong as you very well know. For if I am an offender or have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying. But if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

Festus will respond back in verse 12. "Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, 'You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!'" It was the right of every Roman citizen if they are arrested, they were on trial, they could appeal to Caesar. Caesar was the Supreme Court, the final answer, and they could take their case there. So that's what Paul has requested. When we come to verse 13, we have the introduction of two new characters into the story. Verse 13, "And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus."

Agrippa and Bernice! King Agrippa, he is called. His name is Marcus Julius Agrippa. He is the son of Agrippa I and so he is Agrippa II. He is the great-grandson of Herod the Great. And this Agrippa was born in the year 27 or 28. When his father died in the year 44, Agrippa II was in the court back at Rome with the Emperor Claudius. And Claudius thought that at the age sixteen or

seventeen Agrippa II was too young to be appointed a King over Judea. So he appointed a governor instead. And around the year 50, Claudius gave him a small kingdom left vacant by the death of a man named Herod of Charsus. So around the year 50, he would get a kingdom, a very small kingdom, rather insignificant, but he was a king.

Now Herod of Charsus was the husband of Bernice. We'll get to Bernice in just a moment. Later, Nero added parts of Galilee and Pariah and Agrippa II in honor of Nero changed the name of Caesarea Philippi to Neronius. Now Agrippa II, and I want you to file this. This information will be pertinent. Agrippa II was known for fighting for Jewish causes and being particularly interested in matters of religion. He would fight for the Jewish cause and he was interested in matters of religion. In fact, some say, he was very Jewish. In the year 66, war would break out between Rome and the Jews. And during that year, he sided with Rome instead of the Jews. He was rewarded for doing that in the year 75. He was given the symbols of a praetorian and also additional territory. He died during the reign of Domitian. Some say as early as 93, some say as late as a 100. There is no record of him ever marrying, no record of any children. And as I will state later, talk about just a little more, it was rumored that he had an incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice.

Now Bernice! Bernice is the oldest daughter of Agrippa I, the sister of Drusilla, one of the wives of Felix. And we talked about her last week. She was born in the year 28. Now ladies, listen to this carefully and see if you would like to have been a woman of the court back then. She married her uncle at age 13. His name was Herod of Charsus, that's the guy that died. He died in the year 48, so she is a widow at age 20. She moved in with her brother, Agrippa II. And it is the historian Juvenile that says it was an incestuous relationship. Josephus says it wasn't, but Josephus has a way of writing where he is trying to gain favor from the Romans. So, most scholars wipe out what Josephus has to say and they go on Juvenile side that they had an odd and strange relationship.

Bernice married a man named Palamon, King of Cilicia. But she deserted him and returned to her brother and that's when the story takes place that we are reading. But, after this story, later in her life, she will become the mistress of the future Emperor named Titus. So you see, these are real people, real situations, and if nothing else, I hope you recognize that Agrippa and Bernice are very well connected through relatives and friends. They hover in the upper echelons of the Roman Empire. They have come to town. Now let's see what happens. Chapter 25 verse 14: "When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him."

"To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.' Therefore, when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about one Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. But

when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa said to Festus, 'I also would like to hear the man myself.' 'Tomorrow' he said, 'you shall hear him.'"

So that's the background, that's the setting. Agrippa and Bernice have come to town, and they discuss with Festus what's going on. And Festus talks about this prisoner, named Paul. In fact, we'll learn more clearly that Festus is a little confused. He doesn't even know what to accuse Paul of? "I've got this prisoner, and the accusations of the Jews are nothing." I mean, these are just religious matters for them. "But this guy has appealed to Caesar. I've got to send him to Caesar and I don't even know what to accuse him of?" And so he is sharing that with Agrippa, and Agrippa says, "Hey, I'd like to hear what he has to say."

Verse 23 chapter 25: "So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp..." Pageantry! They've got trumpeters maybe. They've got the best clothing they can put on. They've got an entourage, this is a big deal. And they come into the auditorium and the commanders, and the prominent men of the city are there, and Festus is there. And Festus commands Paul to be brought in. So here you have all the upped-ups of the community, all the religious and political leaders are there. They are all gathered there in their best gowns and Paul is brought in.

Now picture that. What does Paul look like? We actually have descriptions written of him by historians. Paul as you know was not a very tall man. He was a man of diminutive stature. He is kind of stocky from the waist up, bonny, skinny legs that were bowed, we are told. He had a hooked nose, kind of long, and his eyes according to historians were close to his nose. And he was slightly bold and bent over a little bit when he walked. And so here comes this very unimpressive figure into this gathering of kings, governors, city officials, and all the high mucky-mucks of the town. Paul comes in wearing the chains that he is bound in. I have no idea what clothing he has on. You know, when we picture prisoners in court, they have the orange jumpsuit on that has the name of the county jail that they are waiting in until they are tried and sentenced.

I don't know if there is a special garb for prisoners, but Paul comes in to their midst. Verse 24: "Festus said, 'King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him.'" In another words, "I can't find anything wrong with the guy. What am I supposed to say?" "Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write."

He is saying to all these city officials, "I want your help. We need to find something to accuse this guy of because I've got to send him to Caesar. He's got to stand court there. He's got to have a trial, but for what? So I want you to listen. You hear something, let me know. And Agrippa, you help me too." So, in fact, it's just funny to read in verse 27, "For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him." So they know Paul

is innocent. We come to chapter 26. "Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself."

Paul is on trial. But as you will see Paul is the one holding court. Paul will be the one in charge. "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently." "Agrippa, you know our culture, you know our social ins and outs, you know our history, you know our religion, you know all about us. I am grateful to be able to stand before you." And I'm sure he even waved at the others that were there, "...before all of you, to share my belief."

Well, Paul goes on. He tells about his life growing up as a Pharisee. He tells about persecuting Christians, he tells about the experience of meeting Christ on the Damascus road. He tells about his obedience to the call of Christ. And then he describes the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus. And at that point Festus declares, in verse 24 look at that. Chapter 26, verse 24: "Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" He thinks, "Common, resurrected from the dead? And that's the guy you follow? A guy that was dead?"

Well I'll tell you something right now brothers and sisters. There are a lot of people who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead, and a lot of people don't believe in the resurrection of Christ. But I want you to know; everyone who is born again knows that Jesus rose from the dead. Why? Because He is living inside of them! I wasn't there, but I have seen Jesus and I have experienced Him in my life. I know He is alive. He is my Savior. He is my Savior! And so Paul, this great learned man, a reputation for great learning. Festus says, "Your learning is driving you mad."

Now let's get to the passage that is really interesting. Chapter 26 verse 25. Paul says, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things..." Ah, Agrippa knows all about this. That's what he is saying. Agrippa doesn't deny it. "...for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner." "It wasn't done in a vacuum; it wasn't done in a small place. All these things that I am talking about Jesus, they are there. They are a matter of public record. A lot of people are talking about it. He knows about it. I am not making it up."

He goes on to say in verse 27. Here is where Paul takes over. "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?" Now this is the accused asking questions of the judge. "Do you believe the prophets?" Paul will answer. "I know that you do believe." "I know you believe the prophets." "Then Agrippa said to Paul: "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." Now Paul says, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." "I don't like being a prisoner, but I like being a Christian." You see, Paul is in charge of this whole program. You set a man on trial that's filled with the Holy Ghost, and before it's over, he'll be calling for people to have a decision in Christ.

Verse 30: "When he said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." What's their conclusion? "No crime! What are we going to accuse him of? Now we have to send him to Caesar, he's appealed to Caesar, but he should be free. He should be out there without chains."

Well, let's just summarize Agrippa's situation here. Agrippa knows what Paul is talking about. Paul tells him he does, and he agrees. Agrippa believes the prophets. Agrippa is almost persuaded. Almost persuaded! I looked up the word "decide" and the word "decision" in a concordance. The word "decide" is used once, "decision" is used twice. It's used twice in the third chapter of Amos, and it describes people being in the valley of decision. And it has ramifications towards the last days, the valley of decision. Well I didn't learn much in the Bible about a decision, so I went to the dictionary. The dictionary says this. Decision: "A determination arrived at after consideration," did you get it "A determination arrived at after consideration."

Now I want to share a life principle with you. You may have figured this out? Maybe you haven't? And that is this. In life, there are no victories without a decision. There are no victories without a decision. You may believe, and you may believe with all your heart that you need to quit smoking. You never will until you decide. You may believe and believe with all your heart you should quit drinking, using drugs, overeating, being involved in pornography, any destructive behavior. You may believe it with all of your energy, but nothing will happen until you decide. That's the end of it. There is no victory without a decision.

You may believe it's time to start treating your spouse nicer. You may believe that. Nothing will happen until you make a decision. You may believe you need to be a better student, a better person in any way. Fine, great, but nothing happens without a decision. There is no victory until you make a decision. "A determination arrived at after consideration." And you can't go halfhearted into that decision. It's got to be all or nothing!

What about Agrippa? "...almost! Almost you persuade me." Now notice what Paul said, what the Bible records what Agrippa did not deny. He believed the prophets. That means that Agrippa believed all that God said about Himself, all that God said about the Jewish people, and all that God said about the Messiah. Agrippa believed that. Agrippa knew about Jesus, he knew about His teachings, knew about His miracles, knew about His resurrection. Agrippa knew about the Christian church. His dad had arrested and beheaded James. And when the Jews liked that, his father had Peter arrested and was holding him overnight in jail to be triad the next day where Peter would be beheaded.

Do you remember the story? And he assigned sixteen solders to guard Peter. And Peter is chained, hands and legs to two solders on either side. And during the night and angel walks in that cell, and wakes Peter up. And Peter is thinking to himself, "Is this dream or is this really happening?" And the chains fell of quietly. They walked out of that cell together, and all along the way Peter is wondering, "Is this real or am I imagining this?" And they get out and Peter realizes: "I am free." He runs and has prayer. Peter runs to the house where there are some

believers, and they let him in. They have prayer and Peter takes off. The next day, they go to get Peter; he is not there. And Peter lived, but sixteen soldiers lost their lives.

Agrippa knows that, that was his dad. Agrippa knows the story about his dad coming and speaking to the people and saying, "Oh it's the voice of a god, not of a man." And he knows his dad was stuck down dead by God. Worms infested his body and he died painfully. He knows all that. He knows about the Christian church. He is under conviction by the Holy Spirit. Paul is reigning as judge, Paul is calling for a decision, and the man's response is: "Almost, almost you persuade me." And I'll tell you what happened to Agrippa because no decision for Jesus is a decision in another direction.

Let me ask you something. When you say "no" to Jesus, what are you saying "yes" to? You see, many people are wanting this neutral spot. They are not really big on serving God, and they certainly don't want to serve the devil. "Just leave me alone, I just want to be neutral." There is no neutrality. You either "is, or you ain't." There is no neutrality - heaven or hell? There is nothing in between. Nothing in between! And so to say, "Well, wait or almost" is to say "no" to Jesus. And what are you saying "yes" to? You are saying "yes" to the enemy of our souls. You are saying "yes" to death. You are saying "yes" to destruction. You are saying "yes, I don't want God in my life." And Agrippa made that decision. "Almost you persuade me."

Now here is what happened in the year 66 when the war broke out. Agrippa, who was Jewish, claimed to be Jewish, tried to be Jewish, understood the prophets, understood about Jesus, understood the Christian church, understood all that. He sided with the Romans. And in so doing, ultimately through his life became an enemy of God, an enemy of the Jews, an enemy of Jesus, and an enemy of his church. That's what happens when it's "almost!"

I knew when Dave Moe had knocked my glasses off; I was going to make a decision. I couldn't do it halfhearted. There could be no "almost." If I gently shoved him away, I would be pummeled. It was all or nothing. It reminds me of a decision Jesus made. He is there in the garden. He is clawing the ground. He doesn't want to go through with the cross. It's not because He was going to get whipped and the beard plucked from His face, and all the horrible physical things that were going to happen to Him. Jesus is suffering in anguish mentally that we cannot imagine because He knows our sin is going to come upon Him.

And sin separates from God. And Jesus and the Father have been together for eternity past. And all of a sudden that relationship will be ripped apart and Jesus is going to experience the second death that eternal separation from God. It wasn't just that He fell asleep like we do now. It was that final separation death. That's the penalty for sin, and that's what He experienced, and that's what He didn't want to experience. He said, "Oh God is there any other way? Let this cup pass from Me." He is wrestling with that. But when He decided there was no other way, He put his whole, and I mean it, His whole life into it.

He decided for you that day. Are you going to decide for Him? If you walk out of here almost persuaded, I am telling you, you are all the way lost. There is nothing in between. It's either Jesus or Satan. Nothing in between! And you know, in your life you may think of all kinds of areas you need to make decisions to improve. That's great! Do that. Put your whole heart into it. But today, I am specifically asking for a decision for Jesus Christ. We need a Savior. That Savior



has been provided. Our salvation depends on saying “yes” to that Savior. Today, that’s the decision I’m asking for. And I am not asking for a halfhearted decision. And please don’t be hypocritical. I am serious. Do not stand unless you mean it. Do not mock God. Don’t mock your parents who are praying for you and family members and friends. If you mean it, meant it! If you don’t, then be honest. Be honest with yourself and honest with God.

If you are not ready to make a full commitment to Christ, but you are willing to be made willing, stand. If you are at the point where it’s now, and you know it’s now, then stand. I invite you. “Oh God, we don’t want to be almost persuaded. We want to be wholly decided. And it’s You we are deciding for. Please! Nothing in our lives we are holding back. Please be our Savior. Come into our hearts. We pray for Jesus to dwell within us. We pray this in His name, Amen.”