Acts Chapter 26 Verses 1- 3

* Paul has a ***captive*** audience…and that is somewhat ironic! Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, commanders and the prominent men of the city…and essentially they are asking for him to preach to them! And he is **happy** to give them the news of freedom! *Makarios* in the Greek! Same word for **blessed!** This blessing, this happiness, this elation of Paul…it’s ***deep seeded***…why? Because this is Paul seeing Jesus show Himself ***so very faithful to every detail of His Word!***
* This is exactly what Jesus said Paul would do! Back in Acts Chapter 9, *“Paul, you’re a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel!”* When you watch and become an active, *not just witness* but, **participant** in the Lord being *absolutely perfectly and precisely faithful* to His Word…it’s exhilarating! It’s personal! In that you *perceive, think, feel, sense, that He is faithful to* ***you***…which He is, but this is when it becomes real. You ever wire something up and then *pray* before you plug it in? HA! Me too!! But when you turn it on and the thing powers up…**brilliant!** There is elation! There is a “YES” involved!! And that is Paul right here…his heart jumps!!
* Now, on top of that…as messed up as Agrippa is…as lost as Bernice is…as ignorant as Festus is…Paul’s heart is simply to ***give*** them what he was ***given*** and *see them saved (How wonderful would it be!?)*…and here is his **captive audience chance**…***this is blessing upon blessing***….and for Paul, THIS is a moment of moments! In reality, I’m not sure if Paul has more of an enemy than Agrippa. As different as night and day…but underneath all of that reasonable and justifiable emotional *animosity*…Paul finds himself happy to give him the news of God’s grace.

Acts Chapter 26 Verses 4 – 8

* What a great statement! I would think it **incredible**, *unable to credit it as truth*, if a man or a woman were to claim that they could raise the dead back to life…**but God? Come on man!** We’re talking about God! Paul’s opening remarks - *I have hope based on the entirety of the scriptures, reasonable at its core, and affirmed by my own personal interaction and experience with the Lord*…but set all of that even aside…*if God is God then who is surprised if He is able to raise the dead?*
* The ground level application of that is a wonderful truth that when God is the Agent doing the work, any talk of difficulty is ***absurd.*** Think about it! The real issue isn’t CAN He do it, I think the real issue is WILL He do it and I’m so anxious and worried and busy trying to let ***my will*** be done that **my lack of submission begins to show.**
* When God is the one working, things aren’t so hard, they aren’t such a burden. And if they are, take a big step back, breathe and have an honest conversation with God about it. If he’s asked you, given you direction to do or be one way and you can’t find the strength to be that way…that’s ok…that’s honest…that’s ok…God will help. He will encourage you, strengthen you and you **will** trust Him ***or***…***He will send a great fish to devour you!*** HA! Circumstance and consequence of life will most certainly come! But I know that God should not be blamed for the heaviness of the yoke I carry at times.
* If God is running the ministry then it runs and where it goes and what happens with it…*it’s all good.* If I am running it then where it goes I have all planned out and if it doesn’t go that way then something is wrong. I can’t live like that. I’d rather be simple. I’d rather let God work. And where we go, we go with Him.
* During World War II, a US marine was separated from his unit on a Pacific Island. The fighting had been intense, and in the smoke and the crossfire he had lost touch with his comrades. - Alone in the jungle, he could hear enemy soldiers coming in his direction. Scrambling for cover, he found his way up a high ridge to several small caves in the rock. Quickly he crawled inside one of the caves with an especially small opening. Although safe for the moment, he realized that once the enemy soldiers looking for him swept up the ridge, they would quickly search all the caves and he would be killed. - As he waited, he prayed, *"Lord, if it be your will, please protect me.”* - After praying, he lay quietly listening to the enemy begin to draw close. As he waited, he saw a spider begin to build a web over the front of his cave. - As he watched, listening to the enemy searching for him all the while, the spider layered strand after strand of web across the opening of the cave. - *"God,”* he prayed, *"What I need is a brick wall and what You sent me is a spider web?”* - As the enemy drew closer he watched from the darkness of his hideout and could hear them searching one cave after another. As they came to his, he got ready to make his last stand. To his amazement, however, after glancing in the direction of his cave, they moved on. Suddenly, he realized that with the spider web over the entrance, his cave looked as if no one had entered for quite a while. *"Lord, forgive me,"* prayed the young man, as God showed him that ***in the Lord a spider's web is stronger than a brick wall.***
* Of course God can raise the dead! Of course God can heal the broken hearted or the blinded or the bound! Of course God can be fully trusted with my life! If I can accept the first verse of the Bible, *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,”* then I should be **just fine** with *all* of the rest! ***Our concept of God so often limits us!*** Isaiah 40:12 says the *He measured the heavens in the span of His hand!!* And we trust *our own hearts* over His…**crazy!!**
* And so Paul preaches the hope of the Messiah which has been perfectly fulfilled in Jesus and ***all of it all*** (everything He ever said, ever promise of the scripture ever given by the prophets of God) have and has been ***signed, sealed and delivered within the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*** The resurrection **was** the center of the gospel message and today it most certainly ***still is!***

Acts Chapter 26 Verses 9 – 10

* So there we have it…when *they were put to death*…who? Stephen, yes…but what about Jesus? Was Paul a voice in the crowd screaming, *“Crucify Him!?”* It is written of Stephen that when he was tried in the street that all of the nation of Israel, all of the elders, were **no match for his wisdom**…and when they stoned him his face **shone like the face of an angel.** As Paul raged, Stephen called out, *“Forgive them, don’t charge them with this sin.”* Paul was there…and even though it was *hard, and dead, and dark and dull*…his heart broke that day when they killed Stephen…and internally he began to **rage**, even against himself…
* Paul had his chance then…but he didn’t change. He didn’t allow God to help him although Paul knew that there was something ***so very wrong with who he had become.*** Listen, if that’s you, do not harden your hearts against God…**answer Him.** Lives would have been saved, families would have not been torn apart…but Paul refused the Holy Spirit. If ***who*** you have decided to be is not working…***why not just change?*** Why not stop being so easily offended or angered? Why not stop being so self-focused? Why not stop being so lazy!? Why not stop being so prayerless? ***Why not change?*** If its not working…try something different…try trusting God (that’s the key, you need His Holy Spirit). Try **His** way. I have and issue getting raisins out of the little bin in the hotel…been like that for years…just this past week, I tried a different way and now I’m BRILLIANT! **HA!!**

Acts Chapter 26 Verse 11

* Exceedingly enraged against them? What did they do to him? Steal his *matza*…? His rage was not because of them…it was because of him…and for that truth, for that reason, as he did those horrible things and was ***tragically terrible*** to them…he was indeed ***pathetically pitiful.*** You see, with the knowledge of the truth and the heart of God, you don’t have to share in their folly. When you are so poorly mistreated, you can sorrow in your heart of hearts, pray for them, and if the opportunity comes, ***be happy when you share the truth with them.***

Acts Chapter 26 Verses 12 – 13

* I love that…after ***all*** that Paul had done…***all*** the mischief and evil, I would think that God would go all *Magneto* on him and appear to him in the form of knives pointed at him or black clouds surrounding him…***but God surrounds him with light from heaven.*** Oh the grace of God extended to each and everybody out there…

Acts Chapter 26 Verses 14 – 15

* A great truth and reminder that Jesus is the Head of the church and we are the Body of Christ…therefore ***if you mess with us, you mess with Him.***

Acts Chapter 26 Verse 16

* It’s a ***powerful statement*** and a ***truth*** that is too often missed in those that come to the Lord. Jesus says to him and to us, *“Here is the* ***beginning****, the start of your purpose. I will make you a minister and a witness.”* Many cannot find the strength to be a true witness of Jesus Christ. To love and to walk in purity of purpose and strength of grace and eternal kindness. There are many that have no clue what God has purposed for them…Why?
* That word ***minister*** in the Greek is literally ***“servant.”*** ***Before you can ever be a witness of God***, a witness of Jesus Christ first to yourself and in your heart of hearts but also to this world, before you can begin to ***discern and receive*** what God’s purpose is specifically for you…catch your eternal wave here on earth…the reason why you are not empowered by the Holy Spirit…is that ***you perhaps have never accepted the position of servant***, first to the Lord and to others.
* It is so easy, so natural to **serve yourself**…but ***no one is a witness of Jesus Christ, no one walks in the empowering and the liberty of the Holy Spirit, until they first become a servant***…***Many seek to witness…but only few seek to serve***…if you are not yet a strong servant of the Lord and those around you…it’s as simple as this, ***your heart is not yet prepared for the power of the Holy Spirit and for the revelation of His plan…***
* Mark 10:45, Jesus gave us this, *“I have not come to be served, but to serve, and to give My life to reveal that love has* ***nothing*** *to do with self preference, self service or self focus.”* My how we have gotten this wrong and bought into the greatest of lies. Jesus, the *wisest, strongest, bravest, most successful in all of history and eternity*…we ought to seek closeness and alikeness with Him…that’s the **YES** moment of turning the key each day in your life and revealing that you’ve got it *wired correctly*…that’s where the revelation of His purpose for you is…drawing near to Him. It begins with the ***rejection of pride and self-focus and becoming a servant.***