

Readings

Scripture

¹² “In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ ...

³⁰ Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. ³¹ And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” ³² And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”
- Acts 26:12-18, 30-32 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

The sovereignty of God is often questioned because man does not understand what God is doing. Because He does not act as we think He should, we conclude He cannot act as we think He would.

- Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts* (p. 29)

All people – believers as well as unbelievers- experience anxiety, frustration, heartache and disappointment. Some suffer intense physical pain and catastrophic tragedies. But that which should distinguish the suffering of believers from unbelievers is the confidence that our suffering is under the control of an all-powerful and all-loving God. Our suffering has meaning and purpose in God’s eternal plan, and He brings or allows to come into our lives only that which is for His glory and our good.

- Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts* (p. 32)

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and inscrutable his ways!

- The Apostle Paul, Romans 11:33 (English Standard Version)

Paul acknowledged what we must acknowledge if we are to trust God. God’s plan and His ways of working out His plan are frequently beyond our ability to fathom and understand. We must learn to trust when we don’t understand.

- Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts* (p. 20)

Sermon Outline

If Only

Acts 25:13-26:32

The Acts of the Apostles

Brad Anderson

We struggle to live in the present moment with lingering questions.

(Acts 26:30-32)

How does Jesus invite us to live in the present moment with our lingering thoughts?

Yielding willingly... (Acts 25:13-27)

Sharing freely... (Acts 26:1-29)

Trusting completely... (Acts 26:12-18)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- Who is the most important or most powerful person you have had to speak to: A political leader? Your boss? Your father-in-law? How did you feel as you thought about what to say beforehand?
- What is the problem that Festus faces? Why doesn't he just let Paul go? How might Agrippa be in a position to help? (Acts 26:3)
- Compare Acts 26:20 with Acts 20:21. How could you tell someone what it means to be a Christian from these two verses?
- Would you describe Paul's speech as a legal defense or a personal testimony? How are the two related? Do you think Paul's primary goal in this speech is to convince Agrippa of his innocence, or of the truth of Christianity's claims? Why?
- Up to this point, the Romans considered Christians and Jews basically as one and the same. Within five years, the emperor Nero was aware enough of the differences to violently persecute Christians in Rome. From this speech, what might the Romans begin to see as some of the differences?
- In Acts 26:32 Agrippa states that the reason Paul could not be set free was because he had appealed his case to Caesar as a Roman citizen. When have you been prone to ask the question, "If only?" How often have you asked that question in response to a painful situation? How was God accomplishing his purposes in Paul and the world in the very detail of Paul's appeal to Caesar? Whose chains was Paul wearing?
- What difference does it make to you that the events in Jesus' life were public knowledge, things "not done in a corner"? How does that fact negate charges some people make today that the disciples made up all those stories about Jesus?