

“Almost Persuaded!”

I. **INTRO:**

- A. **Almost** - such an emotionally packed word!
1. Who was it who **almost** beat **Michael Phelps** at the wall in the 100-meter butterfly, by 1/100th of a second? {Phelps used an extra 1/2-stroke to edge **Milorad Cavic** from Serbia}
 2. The US mens team **almost** won the 4x100 meter relay,...**but** Darvis Patton & Tyson Gay dropped the baton!
 3. No trophy for the “**almost wins**”. No cheers, no banners, No victory dance!
 4. This morning we meet the man who said to Paul, “you **almost persuade me to become a Christian.**”
 - a) Spurgeon, “Almost persuaded to be a Christian is **like** a man who was **almost pardoned**, **but** he was **hanged**; **like** the man who was **almost rescued**, **but** he was **burned** in the house. A man that is **almost saved** is **damned!**”
- B. **Setting the Stage:** This will be his 5th defense of Christianity.

II. **PAUL v. PORCIUS FESTUS! (25:1-12)**

- A. **FESTUS!** (1-12)
- B. (9) Paul knew he’d have a better chance in a den of hungry lions!
- C. (11) **There are times when believers must use the law to protect themselves & ministry.**
- D. (12) He’s got a ticket to ride!

III. **PAUL v. HEROD AGRIPPA & BERNICE! (25:13-26:32)**

- A. **Setting the Stage:** This will be his 6th & final defense of Christianity.
1. In custody for 2 years, has endured 5 trials, still not charged with **any crime!**
 2. Paul carefully aims the gospel message toward King Agrippa, hoping to win him to Christ.
- B. **POMP & CIRCUMSTANCE!** (25:13-27)
- C. **Bernice** - Did you know that **Drusilla Deville** (from last ch) & **Bernice** were sisters?
1. Actually, they were very **evil** sisters. [Drusilla was younger & much more beautiful]
 2. **Bernice** - known for her **incestuous** conduct. 1st husband was **her uncle Herod of Chalcis**; **then** historians record the scandalous relationship w/**her brother** King Agrippa here. To hush rumors she marries King Ptolemy of Sicily, but after a few years wearied of him, returned to **her brother**.¹

¹ Edith Dean; All the Women of the Bible.

- D. (23) **Pomp** - pageantry, literally φαντασία/phantasia meaning “show, display”.
1. **Contrast** - **Paul was brought in**. Irony! Paul, an heir of the very kingdom of heaven, w/ the freedom the Son of God granted to him, must stand before this pretentious, immoral court in chains.²
- E. (24-27) Festus opens the case by explaining his purpose for arranging this hearing.
- F. (27) Here’s what I have so far for the Emperor, “**Here’s Paul. He’s on trial for...well, nothing I particular!**”
1. Festus hopes Agrippa, being a Jew & knowing religious issues, would help him to write something reasonable to Nero.
- G. **PAUL’S INTRO!** (26:1-3)
- H. (1) **Paul stretched out his hand** - The **gesture** here was a form of dignified oratory, designed to show the **earnestness** of the speaker.
1. **The orator stretched forth the right hand, with the two lowest fingers shut in on the palm of the hand and the other fingers extended.**³
- I. (2,3) Paul’s finest hour. **He gets to tell of Christ's purpose & power to King Agrippa.**
1. He starts to **build a bridge** that Agrippa can cross securely.
- J. **Now he builds his bridge in 3 sections:** Paul’s life **Before Christ**; his **Conversion Experience**; & his life **After Salvation**.
- K. **[1] BEFORE CHRIST!** (4-11)
- L. **Why does Paul make such a big deal about himself as a persecutor of the church?**
1. To establish his credibility w/Agrippa, who like his sister Drusilla, comes from a long line of **Christian-haters**.
 - a) Remember, **Herod Agrippa I**, killed **James**; **Herodias & Herod Antipas**, had **John the Baptist** killed; **Herod Aristobulus** was strangled by his father, **Herod the Great**, who ordered all the killings of the **Bethlehem baby boys**.
 2. Paul’s saying, “**I used to be just like that!**”
 3. I’m sure Agrippa was expecting some wild-eyed, scripture-spoutin fool, but now is faced with a man that isn’t much different from himself.
 - a) This man is **real & transparent** & surprisingly **believable**.
- M. **With this established, Paul moves to the day his life turned a strange new course.**

² Charles Swindoll; Acts; pg. 126.

³ Manners & Customs of the Bible

N. **[2] CONVERSION EXPERIENCE!** (12-18)

- O. (12) **While thus occupied** - meaning, I wasn't on some spiritual quest, or gnawed by doubts, about what I was doing. I was engaged in pursuing my vendetta against Christians, when Jesus stopped me in my tracks.
- P. (13-15) Real simply he says 3 down-to-earth phrases: **"I saw..."**; **"I heard..."**; **"I said..."**
- Q. (18) **Wow! What a concise, believable, & coherent statement of Christianity!**
1. Its not **syrupey**; he does not **dangle** Agrippa over the flames of burning hell; nor does he **alter** the gospel to make it palatable.
 2. **He addresses the king person to person, sinner to sinner, with the simple facts of Christ's mercy, generosity, & love.**
 3. **Sin - What is sin anyways?** Missing the mark; refusal to render to God worship due Him; living against His laws; being unjust; crossing forbidden lines; not only doing what you shouldn't, but not doing what you should (omission & co...); owing a debt you can't pay; having wickedness of heart, enmity of spirit, or shameless deeds. **[Have you mis-stepped in any of these areas? One?]**
 4. **Sanctification - Read 2 Cor.5:15** Wow!

R. **[3] AFTER SALVATION!** (19-23)

- S. But, **knowing the facts** isn't enough. Agrippa must **respond in faith**, so Paul describes what that faith looked like in his own life.
1. **He says I didn't ignore the light & the voice; I obeyed!**
 2. King Agrippa, you need to **trust** Christ & **live for** Him.
 3. **He didn't shake his boney finger of judgment at Agrippa, despite the king's rumored incestuous relationship w/his sister Bernice.**
 - a) Instead he **unwrapped God** for him, by **unveiling Jesus**. **[The suffering Christ nailed to the cross, the shining Savior risen from the dead!]**

T. **MAD!** (24-32)

U. Agrippa sat quite, but Festus had enough.. **You're crazy!**

1. He remained composed & confident, **"I'm not mad...I speak sober truth."**

V. (28) **You almost persuade me to be come a Christian** - Commentators vary widely on what Agrippa was saying here.

1. Said it in jest; bitter sarcasm; irony; anger; expression of sincere conviction?
2. With Paul's response in vs.29 I think Agrippa's heart was touched, because Paul pleads with him to **trust Christ!**

W. (30-32) **Side bar** - to consult with each other.

- X. Yet like **Felix** he also walks off the pages of history w/o a commitment to follow Christ.
1. **Almost!** - Another **dropped baton** like the 4x100 meter relay.
 2. **Almost!** - Milorad Cavic from Serbia **almost** beat Phelps for the gold.
 3. **Almost!** - Agrippa was like the man **almost pardoned**, but was **hanged**;
 4. **Almost!** - Agrippa was like the man **almost rescued**, but was **burned** in the auditorium.
 5. **Almost!** - Agrippa was **almost saved** but now is **damned**, **if** he never responded to such a fine message!
 - a) Agrippa, **DQ'd**, disqualified from salvation, he had it in his hand & let it go!
 - (1) Like the Swedish wrestler **Ara Abrahamian** when he threw down his greco-roman **bronze medal** in protest.
 - b) Agrippa walks away from being crowned one of *The Real Kings Kids* & settles for his **fake title** of king; his **false security** of temporary power on earth; his all around **fake life!** & now his **new nickname** "*Almost Agrippa*"!
- Y. **Paul** was still in **chains**, **yet** his heart was **free**.
- Z. **Agrippa** enjoyed **unlimited freedom & power**, **yet** his heart was **chained in darkness**.
1. So in the end **the prisoner was the free man & the king was the slave**.
 2. Agrippa was **almost** when he could have been **altogether!**

AA. **Life Lessons**

BB. **Hearing** about Christ doesn't automatically bring **internal change** (Agrippa); **Responding** to Christ doesn't automatically remove **external chains** (Paul).

CC. Paul's guidelines in clearly communicating his faith:

1. Establish **common ground**; find **common interest**; be **transparent & honest**; explain the **gospel clearly**; emphasize the need for a **decision**.

DD. Stay calm under pressure:

1. **John White** illustrates the peace that Jesus gave Paul:
 - a) "The **heart** that has this kind of **peace** is like a **lighthouse in a storm**. Winds shriek, waves crash, lightening flickers around it. But inside, the **children** play while their **parents** go about their work. They may look out the window to marvel at the powers that rage around them, but they have **peace** - the peace of knowing that the strength which protects them is stronger than the strength of the storm."⁴

⁴ John White, Greater Than Riches; pg.131

- EE. **End:** I want you to pray about some important decisions here at CCM (Family Mtg)
1. **In regards to finances & staff.** You know, almost everyone is feeling the effects of our economy. I brought our pastors together a 2 weeks ago & asked each to pray regarding there being here [instead of just picking 3/4 employees; prayer]
 2. **This has to deal with 2 of our Core Values: Stewardship & Participation.**
 - a) **Stewardship** - It's the right thing to do. You're having to do this at home & work, we are no different. It would be **wrong** for us to continue w/our # of pastors givin the present finances. (I've stalled since May)
 - b) **Participation** - **How?** Prayer. (Don't walk up to all the pastors, "hey, you leaving?") **Pray for each of them, & let's watch the moving of the H.S.!**
 - (1) Maybe a new church plant; Maybe helping another church that's been praying for a shepherd; Maybe God wants to use them once again in the secular work force, to go find the Agrippa's of our world.
 3. **Not a bummer, but a movement of the H.S.!**
 - a) This is about **advancing** God's kingdom, not destroying it.
 - b) **Gideon went down in #'s & they was successful.**
 - c) God is going to move in a powerful way in our individual pastors & with you!
 - (1) **How?** Because there will be a shift in some ministries that have been paid positions to volunteers. **Again it wouldn't be a bad thing** if there was no paid staff. **We can't get comfortable.**
 - (2) **May God stir each of your hearts to "fill in"** when the time arises.
 - (3) Some of you have been chosen to be **leaders** & maybe we've **held you back** by doing it ourselves?