**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

  **Our Soul’s Eternal Consciousness**

 ***Acts 26***

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

May 30th In the Year of Our Lord

(Anno Domini A.D.) 2021

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

Like last week’s sermon, this sermon will be in two parts. One, detailing with the first part of Paul’s hearing before Governor Festus and King Agrippa II. Then, as promised, an examination of the reasons God and His Gospel Message were not accepted by most people in the 1st century and now.

 We continue our study of God’s Holy Spirit working through the life of the Apostle Paul, in the book titled “Acts”. We need not forget that the title of the book directly highlights that God’s Holy Spirit works in the lives of people (Believers) who have surrendered to Him.

In Acts 26, we see once again Paul is in front of the highest ranked Jewish and Roman officials in Israel, accompanied by the leading citizens of his day in Caesarea. God spares no one from exposure to the Gospel Message. Remember, Romans 1:18 and following when God said that He has revealed Himself through the creation to everyone who has ever lived from the beginning of the creation. Remember that God works-out the details. God orchestrated Paul’s witness and testimony from the beginning of Paul’s calling.

**Acts 9:13-16**

13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;

14 and here he has authority from the chief priests

to bind all who call on Your name."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

 Therefore, Paul knew in advance and fully anticipated his audience. By this time, Paul had been in the mission field for years, surviving and knowing that he was constantly a hair’s-thread away from death. From the beginning of Paul’s calling, while on the road to Damascus, Paul knew that his life was on a one-way ticket to Heaven. Paul knew he was headed in the direction God had pointed him, and he was at ‘a point of no return’. Paul’s mission was one to be accomplished above the preservation of his temporal life. The consideration Paul had was to witness to as many people as he could before he died.

When I was a young boy, I remember the title of a 1945 WWII Hollywood movie – “They Were Expendable” starring John Wayne. The title of the movie made an impression on me. The impression was that there are causes in the world worth dying that are more important than our own lives. Currently, America’s youth culture is addicted to entertainment and entitlements. Therefore, this is not a well-received message. The good news is that I do see that America’s youth who voluntarily join the armed forces most likely conclude that one day their lives may be sent on a mission of no-return for the greater good of America’s freedom. I remember after 9-11 that there was much talk about how many people had joined the armed forces before 9-11 for the benefits, like government-paid college tuition, but then there came a real shooting war. Many came to the realization of what their volunteer papers they signed said. . . They were soldiers, which meant - soldiers go to war and die for their country. Freedom is not Free. That free education had some fine print in the details. Like it was not obvious from the sign on the door of the enlistment office – U.S. Army.

Back to Paul, who had committed his life to God . . . many scholars agree, Paul was most likely beheaded outside of Rome, no later than 68 A.D., after his case was heard by the Roman Emperor.

 On a lighter note. . . we are not all called by God to the ministry to which Paul was called. When I was in Seminary, two missionaries came to tell us about their assignment. It was different. They were missionaries to “show-girls” in Las Vegas. I went home and related their calling to Renee, who immediately, without hesitation, and emphatically revealed that God was not calling us to Las Vegas.

 We pick-up Paul’s witness in the last verse of Acts 25:27 when Governor Festus states . . . "For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

**Biblical Text**

**Paul’s public defense and testimony**

**Acts 26:1** Agrippa said to Paul,

"You are permitted to speak for yourself."

Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense:

**Paul pays respect to King Agrippa and defers to his expert judgement on Judaism.**

 2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;

 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

**Paul gives his Life Account**

 4 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem;

 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

**Paul appeals to the highest authority in Judaism – God.**

**Paul ties defense to God’s promises to Jewish Fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses)**

 6 "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

 7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

**Paul testifies to Resurrection and challenges Jews to limit God**

 8 "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

**Testifies that he, too, persecuted saints**

9 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

 10 "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death, I cast my vote against them.

 11 "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

**Paul testifies to his conversion**

 12 "While so engaged as I was journeying 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, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.

 14 "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

“GOADS” - **Strong’s** **2759 κέντρον** *kentron* **Meaning:** a sharp point

**Origin:** from **κεντέω** *kenteo (to prick)* **Usage:** goads(1), sting(2), stings(1).

**Notes:** An idiom referring to an animal's futile resistance to being prodded with goads

Acts 9:7, 21:40

 15 "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?'

And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

 16 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose,

 I have appeared to you,

 to appoint you a minister and a witness

not only to the things which you have seen,

but also, to the things in which I will appear to you;

17 rescuing you from the Jewish 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 dominion of Satan to God,

that they may receive

 forgiveness of sins and an inheritance

among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

 19 "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

 20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, **that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.**

 21 "For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.

 22 "So, having obtained help from God,

I stand to this day testifying both to small and great,

stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses

said was going to take place;

 23 that the Christ was to suffer,

and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead

He would be the first to proclaim light

both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

**Festus breaks-in and speaks**

 24 While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice,

"Paul, you are out of your mind!

Your great learning is driving you mad."

 25 But Paul said,

"I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus,

but I utter words of sober truth.

 26 "For the king knows about these matters,

and I speak to him also with confidence,

since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

**Paul appeals to King Agrippa directly**

27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets?

 I know that you do."

 28 Agrippa replied to Paul,

"In a short time, you will persuade me to become a Christian."

 29 And Paul said,

"I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time,

not only you, but also all who hear me this day,

might become such as I am, except for these chains."

**King Agrippa confers with Governor Festus**

 30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, 31 and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying,

"This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."

 32 And Agrippa said to Festus,

"This man might have been set free

if he had not appealed to Caesar."

**It is profitable to detail Paul’s defense and consider the components in our own witness.**

1. Be Respectful - Paul pays respect to King Agrippa and defers to his expert

 judgement on Judaism.

2. Speak-up for your life - Paul gives his Life Account.

3. Appeal to some common belief - Paul appeals to the highest authority in Judaism – God.

4. Tie your witness to common community goals - Paul ties defense to God’s promises to Jewish Fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses).

5. Challenge audience to think of unexplainable events - Paul testifies to

 Resurrection and challenges Jews to limit God.

6. Present yourself as once being in their worldview - Testifies that he, too,

 persecuted saints.

7. Give specific reasons for your conversion to belief in God - Paul testifies

to his conversion.

8. Be prepared for spontaneous objections - Festus breaks-in and speaks

9. Appeal to them personally, outside the group they represent - Paul

appeals to King Agrippa directly.

10. Anticipate their conversations between each other. - King Agrippa confers

with Governor Festus.

**Historical Objections to God**

The reason people have not surrendered to the God of Creation and His Word can be directly attributed to . . . “Pride”. Pride includes: me-first-selfishness, egotism, self-indulgence, others or expedient, arrogance, unforgiving and overall rebellion to God. Some may say they do not have enough knowledge to a surrendering belief in God, but then I observe they choose not to look too far. If they appear to investigate God, they turn everything off that does not have a naturalistic or materialistic foundation.

Like the Roman and Jewish leaders, many in our culture today do not see events that cannot be explained naturally (materialistically) as events to believe. So, the Resurrection is always at the center of rejecting God and the mission of His Incarnation – The Cross, Empty Tomb, Resurrection Ministry, and Ascension. All of these represent the application of God’s love, grace and the opportunity for people to be restored to their originally created state of being.

A few weeks ago, I provided historical facts, theological reasons, and basic common-sense observations for the Resurrection. A review is in order here.

**Facts of the Resurrection**

1. Biblical eye-witnesses – the women at the tomb and disciples
2. The disciples and others died martyrs for proclaiming the resurrection.
3. The penalty for a Roman soldier to fall asleep while guarding the tomb of Jesus was death.
4. The Creator of life on earth can also resurrect life (John 1:1-4). This statement lends to an “origin of life” discussion. This is why it is important in our time to appeal to solid reputable scientists, like Stephen Meyer, Douglas Axe and James Tour, to name a few, for real answers. They prove beyond a doubt that life is a miracle for which man has not any answer.
5. The accounts of the Resurrection are immediate and are circulated by word-of-mouth. Legends and myths take many years to form. Scholars agree that passages like 1 Corinthians 15 provide details from those that were there and witnessed what they saw. Paul is repeating an eyewitness account of the Resurrection.

**Resurrection – The foundational message which can start with the question -** Why did God choose the Cross as the event from which to be resurrected?

**1.** The Cross is what God said He would do (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53).

**2.** God fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Remember, Jesus said in Luke 24:44, Now He said to them, "*These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*." Here are a few direct prophecies fulfilled. Luke 22:37, *"For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment."*

**Zechariah 13:7** in **Matthew 26:31**

**Psalms 69:21** in **Matthew 27:34**

**Psalms 34:20** in **John 19:36**

**Zechariah 12:10** in **John 19:37**

**Psalm 16:10; 49:15; 86:13** in **Acts 2:31; 13:35**

Scholars find at least 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

Here are eight common O.T. prophecies noted as being fulfilled by Jesus in the N.T.

1 THE TIME OF HIS BIRTH (SEE THE DANIEL 8 & 9 TIMELINE)

2 HE WOULD BE BORN IN BETHLEHEM. (MICAH 5:2)

3 HE WOULD BE BORN OF A VIRGIN. (ISAIAH 7:14)

4 HE WOULD BE BETRAYED FOR 30 PIECES OF SILVER. (ZECHARIAH 11:12)

5 HE WOULD BE MOCKED. (PSALM 22:7,8)

6 HE WOULD BE CRUCIFIED. (JOHN 3:14)

7 HE WOULD BE PIERCED. (PSALMS 22:16)

8 HE WOULD DIE WITH THE WICKED, BUT HE WOULD BE BURIED WITH THE RICH. (ISAIAH 53:9)

 So, what is the mathematical law of probability for just these eight to be fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth in the 1st century A.D.? 10 with 27 zeros to the right of the decimal point. <https://www.clintbyars.com/blog/2020/7/20/jesus-fulfilled-over-300-prophecies>

<https://rockfordlutheran.org/apologetics-lenten-blog-series-prophecy/>

Here is another source calculating 10 to the 17th power.

https://www.josh.org/jesus-fulfill-prophecy/

**3.** The Cross is one of the most riveting events in human history. In the test of the crucifixion, God marched from the tomb at Gethsemane.

**4.** The Cross possesses an eternal message from God. Contained within the Cross event is the message that sin is so bad and deep-rooted into the psyche of fallen humanity that it takes the event of the Cross to regain attention and focus upon God and His intent for people. God says from the Cross – Stop what you are doing! Look how evil your lives have become! Listen to Me! With the declaration of “Father forgive them for they know not what they do”, we see that all people are called to forgive their neighbor. If God as Jesus could do this from the Cross, then we, too, with God’s Spirit in us can forgive our neighbor regardless of the offense they have committed against us.

**5.** The Cross shakes the fallen consciousness of mankind. Once a person has knowledge of the Cross, they are compelled to make a decision surrounding two questions. Can God forgive me, and can I forgive my neighbor?

**6.** The Cross and the Resurrection calls a person to ask more questions once they have knowledge of the Cross of God - of Jesus the Messiah.

Did God know when he came to be one of us that He would end up on the Cross? Yes. **Psalm 22, Isaiah 53**

Did Jesus ever say that He knew He would go to the Cross? Yes. **Matthew 16:21, Luke 9:22, Mark 9:31,**

Did Jesus say He would rise from the grave? Yes **Luke 9:22, Mark 9:31**

**John 2:19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

**John 10:18** "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

Why does God not let us pay the price of our own sin? God so loved the world. . . **John 3:16**

Can I do anything to gain right-standing with God without surrendering my heart to Him? No **Ephesian 2:8, Romans 4, Hebrews 10**

Is the Cross just an insurance policy so I won’t go to Hell? No. God’s “spiritual power of faith” is at work in Believers each day carrying them through life’s challenges. The Cross represents this power over sin and death.

**Philippians 2:13** for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

**Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

God’s spiritual fruits at work in the life of the Believer makes life more peaceful. There is not any law of man that is superior to God’s spiritual fruits at work (**Galatians 5:22).**

Could there have been another way to pay the price for the sins of the world? No. Without God, humanity has not any power to save itself from eternal destruction and separation from God (Ephesians 2:8). Romans 3:9-18 details humanities total depravity. Jeremiah 17:9 highlight fallen man’s deceitful nature and wickedness. Fallen people suppress God’s truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

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**Sovereignty of God – Love & Grace**

**Ephesians 2:4-5** 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

 I was once asked why I believed in God by a political office holder. I knew the man was attempting to belittle a person of faith in God. To his surprise, I told him that I believed in God because I have seen evil up close. He looked shocked and bewildered. He did not anticipate my response, nor did he understand my response. I told him that there is so much evil in the world we see on a daily basis through the news that there had to be an opposite power and authority. I see he anticipated a different response, like “Jesus died on the Cross for my sins”. Obviously true, but I knew he was waiting for that answer. I wanted to engage him on the basis of his view of reality. I knew that he believed in good and evil. The next question is, from where does good and evil come? This leads to another sermon.

 The denial of the Resurrection is often made with a scoffing attitude and dismissal. However, what is not dismissed is the reality of death and taxes. While taxes will stop upon a person’s temporal death. . . the state of death does not stop. Annihilationism may be presented as a rebuttal to an eternal state of death, but all the evidence of the human experience (and God’s Word) dictates that there is an end to this temporal life and then. . . the afterlife for all. With our temporal lives ending, there comes an examination, a judgement. What evidence? Starting with human consciousness - From where does our consciousness (Soul) come and where does it go? What is the future state of our consciousness (Soul) outside of our bodies? God provides all the answers to these questions. Saint or sinner, we all will leave this life with a full consciousness (Soul Awareness) towards God.

**Romans 9:1** I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,

**1 Timothy 3:9** but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. AMEN