

Changing Your Mind

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[0 : 00] Let's open up to Acts chapter 25. I'm going to start reading from verse 13. We've got a long reading. It's an absolutely riveting story.

So let's get cracking together. Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus.

And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, there is a man left prisoner by Felix. And when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.

I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him.

So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed.

[1 : 20] Rather, they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them.

But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa said to Festus, I would like to hear the man myself.

Tomorrow, said he, you will hear him. So on the next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city.

Then at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. And Festus said, King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer.

But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my Lord about him.

[2 : 34] Therefore, I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable in sending a prisoner not to indicate the charges against him.

So Agrippa said to Paul, you have permission to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense. I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews.

Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and into Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews.

They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion, I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our 12 tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day.

And for this hope, I am accused by Jews, O King. Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

[4 : 01] And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I

punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme.

And in raging fury against them, I persecuted them, even to foreign cities. In this connection, I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

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. 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. And I said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 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, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 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.

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

[5 : 47] For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day, I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here, testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light, both to our people and to the Gentiles.

And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you are out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you out of your mind. Paul said, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.

For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice. This has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

I know that you believe. And Agrippa said to Paul, In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? And Paul said, Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.

Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment. And Agrippa said to Festus, This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

[7 : 24] Thank you so much. Alright friends, I want to begin with a question. When was the last time you changed your mind? And I don't mean something, you know, sort of small or pathetic, but something big maybe.

Something big. Perhaps you changed your mind about a relationship. I was, this is not the last time exactly, but anyway, I remember that I was dating a girl when I was about 18.

We had been dating for two or three years, and I hadn't really been honoring the Lord Jesus in that relationship. But I changed my mind. And I decided that, you know, no, I don't want to compromise anymore.

I'm not going to live this way. I don't want to be a hypocrite. So, I broke up with her. Perhaps you've changed your mind about a relationship. It can be very painful. Perhaps you changed your mind about coming to church.

I mean, welcome, if that's you. You know, it's a great thing to do, a very important thing to do, to keep coming to church. In the Bible, the word for changing your mind is repentance, okay, or to repent.

[8 : 28] It's not just an intellectual word, though. It means to do a 180 kind of a change of mind, a change of heart, a whole reorientation of your identity. And it's a very important part of the Christian faith, right, of Jesus' teaching, and of course, this passage when we come to it.

It's how the Christian life begins, and how it needs to continue. As we learn and grow, we need to change. We need to keep reorienting ourselves to God, to the truth, away from lies, right, to righteousness, away from sin, to thankfulness, away from grumbling, to generosity, away from greed, right, to our new selves, away from our old selves.

So hence the question, when was the last time you changed your mind? And I want to do something a little bit unusual this morning, which is to get you to participate. So, audience participation.

Some of you are excited, some of you are terrified. I've got three questions for you I'm going to ask you this morning. With this first one, when was the last time you changed your mind? I do want you to try and write something down.

Now, I'm not going to hear your answer, I'm not going to get feedback or hear your answers or anything like that. There might be something personal, but I just want you to write down, to try and think as honestly as possible about when was the last time you changed your mind?

[9 : 51] And maybe as tangibly as possible about what that was. What did you change your mind about? Okay, so I'm going to give you 30 seconds. You'll need a pen and a piece of paper, or which, if you need a pen, our lovely ushers are shaking them near you if you need one, you can get one from them.

Just stick your hand up. Yeah, that's perfect. And then they'll help you. Alex, down here at the front. Thank you so much. You can use your phone if you like, but try and write something down.

Take 30 seconds. Think, what's something big I changed my mind on recently, recently, or something like that. Alright, so, hopefully you've got something written down there.

On to question number two. Now what I want us to think about is why do people change their minds? What actually changes people? Perhaps, if you've got something in front of you, you can think specifically about what changed your mind.

But even just in general, why do people change their minds? And this time, I want you to talk to the person next to you for 30 seconds. What kinds of things bring about repentance?

[11 : 09] You know, a change of mind, real, lasting change. It doesn't just have to be a Christian repentance, but what kind of thing brings about a change of mind? Have a chat with the person next to you for 30 seconds. Thanks. Alright, this time I want to hear some of your answers.

anyone can do it. Just stick up your hand and share. Yeah, Hayden? I have somewhat of a definitive answer for a question like that.

Okay. It's usually when something's wrong in your life or you're not quite satisfied with how your life is. Uh-huh. So, you feel like something's missing in it or you're incomplete.

That's a great point. So, when something's gone wrong in your life or you're not satisfied with how life's going or you're feeling complete, that might prompt you to change your mind, change the whole direction of your life.

Well, the phrase is taking the red pill as they say. Taking the red pill. Okay, matrix reference.

Fantastic. Josh? Maybe sometimes negatively in the way advertising works.

[12 : 19] You can try if you like. Just because it benefits you. So, sometimes, like, changing your mind will benefit you.

That's how advertising works. You know, buy our product. It will benefit you. Oh, I do need that product. Right. And an advert, yeah, this is going to be great for your life. It's really going to be a great benefit. Yeah. All right. Yeah, Peter?

Well, I decided to get married. Right. What changed your mind? She did. Yeah. It was 47 years ago.

Right. Next year. And it was because I needed, I felt, to be completed. Yeah, right. Yeah. Somewhat.

Yeah. I have been. Cool. That's good. Anymore? Alex? Getting new information.

[13 : 16] Getting new information. That changes people's minds. Yeah, thank you. Was there one over here? Empirical evidence? Yeah. Great. I'll repeat it. I'll repeat it for you if that helps.

All right. I'll try and repeat it for everyone in the room. Sometimes other people just wear you down. That's definitely true.

My kids have changed my mind that way. All right. That's great. All right. I was, as I was pondering this question myself, okay, I was thinking about the ancient Greeks, as you do, and how they used to describe the art of rhetoric.

Okay. So giving a good speech to change people's minds. You might not think I've thought about this, but anyway. And they would focus on three things. Logos, ethos, and pathos. Right? So logos is the rational argument, the rational kind of content of the argument.

Ethos is the character of the speaker. And pathos is the emotion or the passion of the argument. Okay. So take smoking, for example. You know, if I wanted to persuade you to stop smoking, I might say, well, you know, it's bad for your health.

[14:21] Right? Emphysema, cancer, et cetera. I'm trying to give you some rational arguments. You can trust me because I'm a doctor, although I'm not, so you can't trust me. But anyway, you know, you can trust me because of my qualifications or because I have your best interests at heart. You know what I mean? I'm not trying to trick you. And really, then you should think about the excruciating pain of the way smoking might kill you, the tragedy of leaving behind your wife, kids, et cetera.

You see, I'm trying to use logos and ethos and pathos to make a persuasive argument, to change your mind. And that, you know, that might work with enough persistence. Some people, no doubt, have been persuaded to stop smoking by arguments such as these.

Haven't they? All right, but on to question number three. Last question that I have for you is why don't people change their minds? So again, have a talk with the person next to you for a moment. This time, why don't people change their minds? What keeps people from changing their minds? All right, so what do you reckon about that?

[15:33] Why don't people change their minds? Yeah, Josh again. There was something that convinced you earlier that you're not budging from, still haven't been yet convinced away from.

Daryl? It's too hard. It's too hard? What do you mean? Why? Like, if you change your mind, then it probably flows into other things as well. It's too hard.

It'd be exhausting. Yeah, okay, good point. Gento? People look at that because the cost of changing might be too much. Yeah, the cost of changing might be too much. Yeah. Even if they know they're wrong, sometimes they don't want to hurt their ego.

That's true. That's true. I have definitely had conversations where I've gone away and changed my mind later because I thought this is too humiliating to change my mind right here, right now and just say, as it turns out, you're exactly right and I'm being an idiot.

Mike, did you have one? The same one, Judy? Fear? Fear? Yeah, can you flesh that out a bit? Yeah. Fear. I mean, it's a little bit like normal things and changes, but even more that the unknown fear of the unknown.

[16:55] That's a good one. Hayden, maybe? That's because some people, well, a lot of people fall into one of three categories. They're either stupid, lazy, or arrogant.

That's a nice way of putting it. Stupidity is the smallest percentage. Right. Yeah, right, okay, yeah. That's quite helpful actually, I think. Sometimes there is, like I was thinking, there's a lack of time to process the argument, right, a lack of just misunderstanding the argument, or there might be a lack of clarity in the presentation, but also, even when, yeah, it's not just an intellectual thing, is it?

Like, again, going back to change of mind, it's not just an intellectual problem, like I didn't understand. I didn't want to understand. You know, that kind of vested interest stuff. All right, okay, last one.

Just tied to that, I heard a statement, I think it's true. It's easier to deceive someone than to convince them that they've been deceived.

Easier to deceive someone than to convince them that they have been deceived. Yeah, that's very helpful. All right, great. Okay, I want to dig into the Bible with you, of course. So, we're in the book of Acts, and as I say, this particular passage is all about changing your mind, right?

[18:16] So, it raises a bunch of questions for us, I think, like, I don't know where you're at, but should you change your mind about Christianity? Should you change your mind about God?

Should you change your mind about Jesus of Nazareth? For some of you, it might be time for a radical rethink of who Jesus is. For others, there might be just a few things here and there that you should change your mind on this morning, or in a sense, maybe simply bring to the forefront of your minds.

You know, sometimes the thing, it's not so much that you need to kind of flip, but you need to start living with this in your heart rather than in your head or whatever the right language is to describe that, right? Have it really impress itself upon you.

Now, you'll remember from last week that Paul is in prison in Caesarea. I don't know if I've got a picture of Caesarea. It might come up eventually, it doesn't matter.

Festus is the new governor of Judea, and the Jews want Festus to have Paul executed for various offenses they feel he has committed against them and against Roman law.

[19 : 19] Now, in chapter 25, verse 11, seeing that he wasn't going to get a fair trial in Judea, and seeking an opportunity to witness to Christ in Rome, Paul appealed to Caesar to have his trial heard by Caesar, the emperor.

And in verse 12, Festus was more than happy to grant Paul's request. Except that as our passage today begins, we discover that Festus has a problem. So the passage basically falls into three parts.

And in the first section, Festus has a problem. He assembles the cast, as it were, to lay out the problem to them. So that's verses 13 to 27. Now, we're not going to spend much time in this section just because we've got a long passage and we have to be selective.

But if you've got an outline in front of you, you'll see I've called this section The Court Convened with the subtitle, the question, Are You Interested? By which I mean, are you interested in the truth? Are you interested in the facts, really? We all approach important questions with biases and baggage, don't we? As we've just discussed. We filter out bits of evidence that don't suit our opinions and we latch on to things that confirm our biases or that we think confirm our biases, even if they don't really.

[20 : 35] And in this opening section, as Festus convenes the court, I think one of the things Luke is trying to show us is that Festus and Agrippa both came into this scene with baggage.

Right? When Festus convened this court, he had particular motives for doing so that probably weren't going to leave him all that open-minded to the truth.

In particular, he wants to please the Jews and he wants to please Caesar. And he has two people or groups of people that he wants to please. Festus is a political man caught between these two groups, at least these two.

And he wants to do well. He's a new governor. He doesn't want any trouble from his subjects, right, if he can help it. And he doesn't want any trouble from his boss if he can help it. Right?

He doesn't want Caesar to think he's an idiot. So, you know, there's an old saying, there are none so blind as those who will not see. Right? Willful ignorance. We all have biases and baggage.

[21 : 35] Sometimes we don't want to understand things for financial reasons or political reasons, popularity, comfort, status, etc. So, is Festus really going to be listening to Paul interested in the truth?

There's another old saying. I just, it's on the tip of my tongue. That one about, it's almost impossible or something to persuade someone of something that is going to affect their wallet or their hip pocket or, do you know this one?

But again, it's all about biases. You know? So, the question as we embark on Acts 25, verse 13 to 27 is, is Festus really going to be listening to Paul interested in the truth?

Or is this all just politics for Festus? And then what about you? Right? And likewise, Agrippa comes with his own baggage and biases. We won't go into all the gory details, but Agrippa, King Herod Agrippa II, just for those who don't know, comes from a notorious family of paranoid murderers and adulterers.

And first of all, Herod the Great, he's, I think I've got his family tree actually. Is that right? That's not it. Yes.

[22 : 53] That's Herod the Great, right? He's the big granddaddy of the clan. He was the Herod who was around when Jesus was born. So he met the wise men and ordered the murder of all the babies. Then one of Herod the Great's sons, Herod Antipas, was responsible for beheading John the Baptist, right?

Because John criticized his marriage to his brother's wife. And he's the Herod mentioned at the end of the Gospels who mocked Jesus and became friends with Pilate and so on, even though they'd been enemies up to that point.

But they came together over the killing of Jesus. Now the next guy, Herod Agrippa I, he was Herod the Great's grandson through his father and also his great nephew through his mother, which, if you can sort of do the math, is a little bit disturbing.

But it's because his mother's mother and his father's father were siblings. Okay. Now he's the Herod mentioned in Acts chapter 12 who killed the Apostle James and then was, and when that pleased the Jews, he also imprisoned Peter.

Eventually, he was struck down by an angel for allowing people to proclaim him a god. Which brings us finally to his son, Herod Agrippa II in this passage.

[24 : 05] Notice he arrives with Bernice. Bernice was his older sister and he was also in an incestuous relationship with her. There are several things in Agrippa's life that might make him quite reluctant to really hear what Paul has to say.

Wouldn't you say? Is Agrippa going to be open to repentance? Is Agrippa going to turn away from his entire family and everything they've ever done to God and to his people?

Now, just cast right down to verse 18. As Festus gets Agrippa up to speed, notice one more thing just while the stage is being set. Festus says to Agrippa, when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed.

Rather, they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus who was dead but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Now, that is a very succinct summary of the nub of the issue.

Right? Paul hasn't committed any legal or moral offense against the Jews or the Romans. Festus knows that. But the key issue seems to have caused so much angst is that Paul has been teaching about Jesus' resurrection.

[25 : 19] So, the stage is set. You know, all rise for the Honorable King Agrippa. You know, the kind of thing. The court has been convened. And then Paul delivers his defense in chapter 26 verses 1 to 23.

Notice in verse 3, Paul begs Agrippa to listen patiently. So, will he? Are you listening? And Paul thinks that Agrippa of all people should be able to understand the argument because he knows that Agrippa is familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews.

I mean, his family have been involved all the way along this story. Now, again, it's a fairly long speech and there are lots of wonderful details but I just want to pick up on two big points, really.

Right? And each under the heading, Are you aware? So, this section is really all about the facts, getting the facts straight. So, if you're listening, if you're interested in the truth, are you aware, first of all, that the resurrection of the Messiah and of the whole nation of Israel was foretold long ago in the Old Testament scriptures?

You see, verse 6, Paul says, Now, I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers to which our 12 tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship night and day.

[26 : 43] And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O King. Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? Now, Paul doesn't mention any specific passage here.

At least, Luke doesn't record one if he did, probably because he's already done so previously in the book. But there are any number of places in the Old Testament that Paul might be referring to.

Whether from Abraham in Genesis 22, when Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac, the promised offspring, he shows that he believes in the resurrection of the dead.

Or Moses in Exodus chapter 3 at the burning bush. God is the God of the living and not the dead. David in Psalm 16 says, You will not let your Holy One see decay.

Hosea in chapter 6 says, On the third day you will revive us. Ezekiel in chapter 37 says the famous passage about the valley of dead bones. Dead bones, dead bones, and them dry bones.

Now, again, the point is not to go through all the details here. I only want to illustrate what Paul says, that God's people have always believed in resurrection. Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Jesus.

[27 : 51] Moses about 1,400 years before Jesus. David about 1,000 years before Jesus. Hosea lived about 700 years before Jesus. And Ezekiel lived about 600 years before Jesus. See, what Paul is arguing in this passage is that this resurrection hope is not something new or novel or weird.

It's just classic orthodox faith. Verse 7, This is what the 12 tribes have been waiting for, longing for. What did you think this religion was all about?

Verse 8, Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? Right? It's just what he promised he would do. And surely it's not difficult to imagine, is it, that the God who made the universe and everything in it and all the life that we see around us, if he did it once, he can do it again.

I think that's exactly what Abraham believed. If God made the stars and God promised me offspring as many of the stars of heaven, even though I'm dead and old, I know he can do it.

It's happened once it can happen again. It's actually a perfectly reasonable position to hold. So that's fact number one of the Old Testament prophets. Are you aware that the Old Testament in passage after passage points to a God who can raise the dead and predicts a time when God will raise the dead?

[29 : 13] Will raise his Messiah and then will raise the whole nation of Israel. If you look up the Old Testament manuscripts, which we still have today, copies from before the time of Jesus, that's just what they say.

Are you aware? But secondly, of course, Paul wants to talk about his own personal encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. So this time, I want to ask you the question, are you aware that the Apostle Paul, or rather Saul, the Pharisee, as he was known then, are you aware that he actually met the risen Lord Jesus after he'd been crucified and then raised from the dead?

Paul actually met him on the road to Damascus. Pick it up in verse 9. I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme.

And in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. Paul's point, of course, is to show us the contrast between how he used to think and what he now thinks.

[30 : 28] So that we might ask the question, what changed Paul's mind? What explains such a radical change of mind? And then Paul is happy to supply the answer for us.

It's not that he was sitting in his armchair and just pondering the whole thing one day. It's not that he was reading the scriptures. It's not that he worked it out. No, he had a dramatic encounter with the risen Lord Jesus that transformed him suddenly and decisively.

He went from being a persecuting Pharisee to a persecuted preacher of the Christian faith in a matter of days. Within days of his encounter with Jesus, he started preaching the faith that he had once tried to destroy.

preaching the news that Jesus really was alive and that he was the promised Savior King, that everyone should bow the knee to him because his reign, though in heaven now, will one day spread across the whole earth.

So what explains that? If you've got a better theory, I would like to hear it. What else went down on that road to Damascus? One of my favorite lines in this passage is there in verse 14.

[31 : 41] Paul is talking about what the Lord Jesus said to him when he appeared to him. He said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It's hard for you to kick against the goads. Now you know what goads are, right?

A goad is a spiked stick used for driving cattle. Today we would use an electric cattle prod or something like that. It gives them a sharp prick, to go in the right direction.

But a stubborn animal, like a mule or an ox, might kick against the goads, right? That is, they want to go their own way. They don't want to go in the direction of their master, even if they're being prodded and poked.

But in the same way, Jesus said to Saul, Paul, Saul, you have been kicking against the goads. You have been stubbornly ignoring my prompts to change direction.

Now I'm not exactly sure what Jesus might have in mind, perhaps the Old Testament prophets, perhaps John the Baptist, right? John the Baptist gave the whole nation a chance to change direction.

[32 : 46] But I think perhaps Stephen is the most obvious candidate, right? And the other Christians that Saul was persecuting. We know Saul was there when Stephen gave his crystal clear speech, proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah.

But Saul approved of his murder. You remember the whole crowd blocked their ears physically and just ran at him. Every quick Christian witness that Saul met was another chance to change direction, but he stubbornly refused to listen and to heed the master behind them all.

Why, Saul, Jesus asks, why are you persecuting me? And then Jesus provides the answer.

Stubbornness. Like a mule or an ox.

Saul, you have been kicking against the goads. I am sort of reminded of C.S. Lewis' conversion, if you know that story. Obviously what happened to the Apostle Paul is unique.

Lewis didn't have a vision of the Lord Jesus or meet the Lord Jesus or anything like that. But Lewis talks about how he didn't want to become a Christian. And he wasn't thrilled about becoming a Christian even when he did.

[33 : 57] In his book, *Surprised by Joy*, he wrote, You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalene night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet.

That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity term of 1929, I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed. and perhaps that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing, the divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms.

Isn't that beautiful? The prodigal son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape.

I mean, it's a beautiful reflection, isn't it? On the mercy of God. I don't know if some of us were converted in similar circumstances. But of course, Jesus didn't just appear to Saul and Saul wasn't just converted on the road to Damascus but he was also commissioned by Jesus to a particular task.

[35 : 28] And again, that task, notice, is all about change. So Saul asks in verse 15, Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

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, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you 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.

So again, the main thing I want you to notice is the radical change language in verse 18. It's all about turning. Jesus is sending Paul to open people's eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

When you're blind, you don't know that you're in the dark, whether you're in the dark or the light.

Now, you couldn't get any more radical transformation than that, could you? Right?

Of course, it will take a miracle of God to open people's eyes. It's not just something Paul will be able to manufacture. God is going to have to work through Paul. But when people's eyes are opened, then they will be able to leave the ignorance and the wickedness of darkness and find the truth and righteousness of the light.

[37 : 00] And notice, becoming a Christian is about turning from the power of Satan to the power of God. We don't often think about this one, but what the Bible says is that there really is a spiritual realm.

Right? It's not all just atoms and quarks out there. Right? There really is a spiritual realm and that Satan is an evil spiritual being who blinds people to the truth by deceiving them with powerful lies. He is like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Right? Do you remember that children's story? The Pied Piper of Hamelin who led all the children astray. Satan's goal is to destroy us and he does that by stringing us along with mesmerizing lies.

Now, just as one example, I was listening to John Lennon's song recently, *Imagine*. *Imagine there's no heaven. Maybe I should try and give you the rendition.*

No. Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. No hell below us, above us, only sky. Imagine all the people living for today.

[38 : 06] *Whoa! It's a lovely tune. At least I think so. But there are a few problems with the lyrics. I mean, first of all, of course, if you're interested in the truth, the whole framing of the song is wrong, isn't it?*

Why on earth would we be relying on our imaginations to answer such an important question? I mean, what if there actually is a heaven and a hell?

What if there actually is a God who will call us to account? At that point, whatever you've imagined, it's not going to be of much use to you, is it? But more to the point, apart from the lovely tune, the ideas in that song are horrifying.

Imagine all the people living for today. That's what we've got, isn't it? Well, more and more. That's what causes so many of the problems in our society.

I mean, imagine if people planned prudently for the future. Now, that's a song I could get on board with. It's just not as catchy. Imagine no heaven or hell.

[39 : 15] No consequences for your actions. That's a horrifying thought, not a happy one. We should have a whole conference about this. It means everything we do is meaningless.

There'll be no true justice ever. Any sense of hope or optimism is only an illusion. We're all just going to burn out in the sun. But you see, friends, Satan's lies always work like this.

Sugar-coated poison. And they sound lovely on the surface. They're set to a lovely tune. But when you bite into them, when you scratch the surface, they bring only death and pain and misery.

So, friends, becoming a Christian, what Paul was sent out into the world to do for us and specifically for us Gentiles is to turn us back to God. To change our minds.

To help us to repent. To free us from the lies of Satan and to embrace the truth once more. And notice, if you turn back to God, Jesus says, you will receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Him.

[40 : 22] Forgiveness of sins means it's as if our rebellion against God never happened. All the debt we've racked up against God over the years, God wipes it clean. Forgiveness means God will not hold our sins against us.

It's often twinned with forgetting. You know, God forgives and then He forgets. You never even did it. That's what Jesus' death on the cross was about. And then a place among those who are sanctified.

So, after forgiveness comes belonging. A place. Those who are sanctified means those who have been set apart to belong to God. In the Bible, sanctification is not used to describe the process of transformation.

Alright? Although that's often how theologians talk about it. But that's not what Paul means here. That's not how the word sanctification is used in the Bible. Sanctification here, he means that we have been set apart, singled out, separated out from the masses.

We have been put into a different category from the rest of mankind. We are no longer common. We are holy. And this happens immediately upon conversion.

[41 : 31] And it happens by faith in Jesus. It's not by works. It's not by getting baptized or doing some other ritual. It's by faith in Jesus. When we put our trust in Jesus, simply asking him to help us, for instance, and to do for us what we can't do for ourselves, that is all we need to do and the job is done.

Jesus accepts those who come to him in faith then and there he grants them forgiveness immediately. They are sanctified and saved immediately. So having explained all this, Paul says in verse 19, therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Now I think the obvious implication here is something like he's saying, what was I supposed to do? What was I supposed to do? You know, just go on living as a Pharisee?

Persecuting the Christians? Of course not. I had to change my whole life. And then I had to go out and tell the world to change. Verse 20, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

And if Jesus is Lord, if Jesus is the risen King who will one day judge the earth and establish his kingdom forever, then that means everyone needs to repent. Everyone has a massive mind and heart change that they have to make.

[43 : 01] And then the way we behave, our deeds need to change as well in keeping with that repentance. The fruit of a changed mind, the fruit of sanctification is transformation in keeping with that repentance and that new found holiness.

Which brings us to the third and final section of the passage where we hear about how Festus and King Agrippa responded to Paul's defense. And so obviously the last question for us is how are we going to respond?

Are you persuaded? So Festus' initial response is to accuse Paul of madness. Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, you are out of your mind.

The great learning is driving you out of your mind. Very often people like to write off the Christian message as simply madness, don't they? You know, Christians, Christianity is for the intellectually weak, people inclined to believe in fairy stories, myths and legends.

You know, Christianity is for children. There's no need to take it too seriously. I have to say in my experience it's a brilliant response. You know, when you really don't have an answer to the point someone is making, just shout over the top of them.

[44 : 19] You know, when they've got you in checkmate, just flip the board over. Claim that the whole discussion is beneath you and that you won't dignify their lunacy with a response. And I suspect Luke is hinting at that, just that that is exactly what Festus is doing, just with that little phrase that you notice halfway through verse 24.

Festus said with a loud voice. Yeah, it's time for a loud voice. This is typical of fear, weak logic and poor argumentation, isn't it?

Just raise your voice. Our society seems to be adopting this strategy more and more and if you don't like what people are saying, just shout louder, shout over the top of them, drown them out. Don't worry, why let the facts get in the way of your lifestyle and your gut reactions and your popularity considerations? But Paul calmly responds that what he's saying is true and rational and I've always liked that last phrase in verse 26, Paul says, these things have not been done in a corner.

They haven't been done in a corner. That distinguishes! Christianity from so many other religious claims and gurus, doesn't it? Including Islam we were talking about last week. What the Bible teaches us about God and about Jesus did not come privately to an individual or a small group of fanatics while they were in a cave or up on a mountain or what have you.

[45 : 49] All of these things happen in public, out in the open. Jesus was a man who walked around Galilee. He was publicly crucified by the Romans. Other non-Christian historians write about his life.

He was raised from the dead and appeared to hundreds of people on multiple occasions over several weeks. Paul was just one of many. This is a matter of public record, of facts, of history. People ate with Jesus and talked with him and touched him after his death and resurrection so that his miraculous resurrection could be confirmed. In the normal way of things, eyewitnesses, careful historical records, Paul's argument is not irrational.

Then in verse 27, Paul turns to Agrippa, Agrippa, who is far more across the fact than Festus remember. Paul says to King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

I know that you believe. Agrippa said to Paul, in a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? Paul said, whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains.

[47 : 02] Agrippa's response is to sue for time. And in a sense, there's a legitimacy to that, isn't there? Sometimes arguments take time to percolate, to consider.

I can understand if there's anyone here today who might be new to all this stuff. It's probably a lot to take in. Often people need time to process things, investigate things, it's okay if you've still got questions or doubts or things that you want to consider.

Paul says short time or long. But friends, don't put it off for forever. Listen to Paul's plea here. And it's my plea to you as well if you don't yet know Jesus.

We're not trying to coerce you. We don't want to pressure you or rush you or force you into anything. But we do want to persuade you that Jesus really is the Lord of all.

And you ought to submit your life to Him. The proof of Jesus' lordship is His resurrection. It's just what God promised for centuries beforehand in the prophets for thousands of years.

[48 : 05] Jesus is the long-awaited promised immortal king. He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. He will reign over God's kingdom forever. One day when all the kingdoms of this world come to an end, Jesus alone will reign.

And you can be part of His kingdom if you trust in Him. It will mean repenting, changing your mind and your whole lifestyle. You will have to leave behind things that right now you might really be scared to leave behind.

I understand changing your mind is hard, but this is the most important and wonderful change of mind that you can ever experience, turning away from the lies of Satan, to live under the rule of such a good and wise, forgiving and loving king as Jesus.

And for those of us who are already trusting the Lord Jesus, of course, there is still plenty more changing to do, isn't there? Or are you finished?

Are you perfect? Are you complete yet? No. None of us are, are we? There are things that we don't know yet that we need to discover.

[49 : 17] There are things we know but don't really know in our heart of hearts. I think the verse that strikes me the most in this passage are the ones where Paul describes his purpose.

So just going back to those, why the Lord Jesus sent him to open our eyes so that we may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that we may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus.

And the language here reminds me very much of Ephesians chapter 5. So you might just want to go to Ephesians chapter 5. I'm not sure if I put it on the screen, I can't remember.

But Ephesians chapter 5, you can find it in your Bibles. I take it this is the kind of application for us this morning.

We don't need to come up with our own application because Paul tells us himself how to respond. He says in verse 3 to brothers and sisters, but sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you.

[50 : 22] As is proper among saints. Set apart sanctified ones. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking which are out of place. But instead let there be thanksgiving.

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them.

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. So that brings me to one final question this morning which I want to leave you with.

[51 : 19] I know you have done a lot of work. Three questions. When was the last time you changed your mind? Why do people change their minds and why don't people change their minds? But this last question really is the most important one for many of us.

Where do you still need to change your mind? What's the next thing? Even if you have been a Christian for many years you haven't given up repenting have you?

Paul mentioned sexual immorality. He mentioned speech especially angry speech. He mentioned covetousness. Perhaps there is something you have been struggling with recently brothers and sisters.

We must repent. Bring it into the light so you can see it for what it really is. And then turn away from it towards all that is good and right and true and pleasing to the Lord.

And we can help each other even this morning as we talk about these things that we want to change in our lives, to run away from, so that we can follow our Lord Jesus and not the filthy lies of Satan anymore.

[52 : 24] Let's pray. Loving Father God, open our eyes to see the truth about who Jesus is, to see the truth of his gospel, of his kingdom, and help us to turn away from our sins, to leave behind the lies of Satan, the things that make us corrupt and compromise us, the things that will ultimately destroy us.

Help us to kill off our sin so that we can walk in the light and live new lives by the power of Jesus and his resurrection. Help us to encourage each other, to spur each other on, to keep growing, to keep changing, that we might be more and more conformed to his image.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.