

# Acts 25:23-26:32

## Outward Church: Always Be Prepared

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

A couple of years ago, Monica and I went through this brief stent where we were really into TV shows about preppers, people who are prepared for disaster. We'd watch these shows, and it would always go like this. "Katie lives in downtown Salt Lake City, but she's been stockpiling canned goods, dried food, and has a bug-out bag ready to go if she needs to leave in a hurry. Katie is afraid that the famous salt-lake city volcano could erupt at any moment, and she is always prepared." There's footage of her apartment stacked full of canned goods, buckets of food, and a bug-out backpack ready to go.

And then they run Katie through a scenario. "Alright, Katie, you receive word that the Salt Lake volcano will erupt in 90 minutes. What do you do?" And instead of her getting in her car and driving away, she rushes around, grabs her backpack, and hikes through the center of Salt Lake City, Utah. And at the end, they rate Katie, "Katie, next time, leave the paper towels" or "Katie, just get in your car and drive to grandma's." Monica and I loved this show so much we also bought a prepper's kit, so if the world ends, we'll have freeze-dried carrots and powdered cheesecake ready to go.

What's the message? Always be prepared. Always be prepared for what? For the Salt Lake volcano? For a tsunami? For a famine? For a pandemic?! . . . It's too soon.

### **1 Peter 3:15** (NIV)

But in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

As followers of Jesus, we don't have to be freaking out about the Salt-Lake biggie, the next market crash, the next failed job interview, or the next terrible event in the news. Why? Because we have hope? And when we display that hope, people are going to wonder why. "Why are you so hopeful? What's there to be happy about? You say you have peace. Why is that?" So, are you prepared to answer?

Notice, Peter doesn't say, "Give the best answer," or "list 20 reasons why we can trust the New Testament manuscripts" or "argue apologetics for Jesus, reasons to believe." Instead, it seems to suggest that *we are the apologetic*. Don't just preach apologetics, but *be the apologetic*. Live your life and share your hope in Christ.

God gives the Apostle Paul an opportunity to explain his hope, and it's in the most unusual of circumstances. He's been in prison for two years. He's appealed his case to Caesar Nero. But before the local ruler, Festus, sends him to Rome, he hears his case, joined by Agrippa and Agrippa's sister-girlfriend Bernice.

As he stands before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice, Festus gives Paul a chance to share his hope. He says to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Paul defends himself, but not how we might do it if we were accused. Instead, Paul gives a three-part testimony, which I want to go over with you today. If Paul, or perhaps the author of Acts, Luke, were to explain Paul's outline, his **testimony outline** might go like this:

1. My life before Jesus
2. How I met Jesus
3. How Jesus has changed me

This is the basic format Paul gives for his story, and I want us to go through it today. In the first couple verses, 1-3, Paul acknowledges King Agrippa's authority and his familiarity with Jewish customs.

## **My life before Jesus (vv. 4-11)**

Paul talks about his life, religious upbringing, and strict adherence to Jewish law and teachings. Paul was a Pharisee who honored and respected the Hebrew scriptures, the law, prophets, and writings and believed in the resurrection of the dead. Paul then identifies his beliefs with those of the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers of the Hebrew people. He's on trial for that hope. "And for this hope I am accused..." What's Paul doing? He's describing his life before Jesus, its connection to his Jewish identity, and the hope he has now, and we can each do something similar.

But Paul doesn't just highlight the good parts; identifying as a Pharisee like his prosecutors. Paul knows that it's not just the good parts of his story that testify to God's grace in his life, but the bad parts too. He says, "I was convinced that his movement around Jesus of Nazareth was wrong, and I was opposed to it." This word for "opposed" is like that same wind that swept down the mountains outside Galilee and churned-up storms, nearly drowning the disciples (Matthew 14:24; Mark 6:48; Acts 27:4). Paul was a hurricane against Jesus. He was a hurricane as he hunted believers, threw them in prison, and put them to death.

As we think about our own lives, some of us will have dramatic stories of who we were before we met Jesus. We were hurricanes. We were sinning in an obvious way. When I was a part of my youth group growing up, the most impressive testimonies were always the youth leaders who were smoking, drinking, or doing drugs before they got saved. But not all of us have stories like those. I said the "sinners' prayer" when I was four years old, and I'm pretty sure I wasn't smoking, drinking, or doing drugs before then. Of course, I can't remember that time very well, so who's to say.

When I share my testimony, I highlight a part of my life when I lived more for myself than for Christ—which would be my teen years. For several years, I was drinking and doing sinful things till one day; it caught up to me by God's grace. If you go to our website, [you can listen to it](#) or watch lots of [faith stories from Cornerstone people](#) where they describe their journeys, and they're all different. But most of them highlight, in some way, a starting point from where Jesus has changed them.

Today, when we break into our small group for discussion time, we're going to have a chance to tell our [three-part testimonies](#), so I hope you'll begin to think about what your life was like before Jesus. We don't need all the details but a glimpse. So we start with my life before Jesus, and part two:

## **How I met Jesus (vv. 12-15)**

Paul's testimony takes a dramatic turn when he meets the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. He describes his conversion, [found in Acts 9](#), in his testimony before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice. He grew up zealous for God and the law, and when this new sect arose from Judaism that claimed to eat the body and blood of their risen Messiah, he was the first to try to end them. But this happened:

### **Acts 25:12-25 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. <sup>13</sup> About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. <sup>14</sup> We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

<sup>15</sup> "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'



## Service & Sermon

You can watch the entire service on Facebook or only the sermon on YouTube (coming soon).

## Discussion Questions

**Emotion:** What's one thing you're looking forward to and one thing you're dreading this week?

**My life before Jesus** – What was your life like before you met Jesus? Or, if you've been a Christian most of your life, has there ever been a period of wandering? If not, that's okay; just share your story.

**How I met Jesus** – How did you meet Jesus? What “goats” did he prod you with? What was the tipping point for you?

**How Jesus has changed me** – How has Jesus changed your life and given you hope? How is he still working on you today?

Dear Church,

Thanks for listening to this past Sunday's sermon, *Always Be Prepared*. I preached a message last May where Mark Pender shared his faith story, *Three-Part Testimony* ([only testimony here](#)). If it would help you write your own or think it through, please listen. Here are a few more ways to go deeper this week.

In Christ,  
Pastor Jonathan

<https://cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/three-part-testimony-acts-2127-2222-jerusalem-riot-pauls-speech/>

## Spiritual Exercises

**Pray** – Ask God to help you prepare and be ready to share your testimony of coming to faith in Christ at any time. Write out your testimony and pray that God would give you the opportunity to share it this week with someone on your frontline (the people you're around every day).

## Content Curation

**How to Article** – Wondering how to write your testimony, your faith story? We'd love to have you share it on a Sunday morning. Here's one of our articles explaining how to write and share it. *Faith Stories Explained*: <https://cornerstonewestford.com/2016/10/14/faith-stories-explained/>

**Sermon** – Pastor Skip Heitzig of Calvary Chapel in Albuquerque, New Mexico, does a great job giving the context and background of Acts 25-26. He also teaches through other books of the Bible, so he is a helpful resource to look up on YouTube when you want an overview of a passage. I don't always agree with his application to the present time, but I still appreciate his messages. Enjoy! <https://youtu.be/ZOdjSEL7eAw>

**Baptism** – Did you know that getting baptized is a great opportunity to share your testimony? You can invite your family and friends and tell them about Jesus. If you're interested in getting baptized at Cornerstone, please watch our [four-part baptism class](#). It takes less than an hour.