

So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: ² "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,³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. ⁴ "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵ 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. ⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?⁹ "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. 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,^[a] '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.' ¹⁹ "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² 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: ²³ 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.” ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. ²⁶ 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, for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”^[b] ²⁹ 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.” 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.”

(Pastor prays)

Sometimes it can genuinely feel like your life is a series of setbacks that go beyond your control and have no real meaning. You go to crank the motor and the battery is dead. You have a car payment due and the washing machine goes out. A management change at work jeopardizes your future. Or, the worst thing of all, your tag expires and you must go to the purgatory called the DMV.

Sometimes the setbacks are more than just frustrations- sometimes they are more personal. The doctor finds a blockage in your heart or a lump in your breast or a shady spot on an X-Ray. Or maybe the setback is with you and it's more internal. The addiction keeps you stumbling or the anxiety keeps getting victory and your life is not going at all like you thought it would go. I mean isn't that where Paul would be, sort of jerked around in life by one setback after another?

That's got to be how Paul felt. So much of his life was spent doing things he hated. Travel and trials and where we find him, he's two years in jail. This guy is a missionary, and missionaries take a break now and then but they want to be on mission. They want to make their time count. But so much is spent in a setback. Maybe you're in one,

maybe by your own doing. I think this passage can help clear up the muddy water and you can look at the interruption and frustrating difficulty. Let's look at the passage and set it up and then dial in on a couple of verses. (Pastor goes over the chapter).

Despite the Setbacks – Your Life is Useful to God

You thought you would be married by now. You thought it wouldn't cost so much to live. You thought you would retire sooner. What is the Lord doing in your life?

God Intends the Problems to be Opportunities

I'm not saying that in some cotton-candy, self-help, motivational speech way. I'm saying that a good and sovereign God has you here as an opportunity. Just like He did Paul. What was Paul doing there in Chapter 26? He's in the middle of a two-year setback and the people who control his future think he's insane. Festus even says so in v. 24: "Paul, You're out of your mind. Your great learning is driving you out of your mind." And here is Paul, the holy and humble spindly little preacher standing in front of the worldly, ambitious, and morally corrupt family of the Herods.

Remember the Herods. 1) Herod the Great – Infant Jesus 2) His son Antipas – cut off John the Baptist's head 3) His son, Agrippa – killed James (son of Zebedee). Paul is standing in front of Agrippa's son who is living with his own sister in unmitigated sin and Paul once again has a chance to tell his story for the third time. In V. 4-8, Paul sets himself up as a really solid Jewish man. He is a Pharisee. In V. 9-11 he describes all the sinful things he did. V 12-18, he talks about his conversion experience in detail. In v. 16 of the story of how Christ converted him after being knocked to the ground, notice what Christ tells him: Stand up, you have a purpose, you are chosen, you're a servant and a witness. Serving is what you *do* and a witness is what you *say*. Serving is how you *approach* life, witness is what you *say* about life. Serving is how you *see* yourself, witness is how you *explain* yourself and, more pointedly, how you tell the story of how the life and death and resurrection of Christ has changed you.

God intends the problems and setbacks, the job loss, the sickness and real anguish you experience to be an opportunity to declare: 1) the goodness of God, 2) the saving power

of the cross and 3) the undying truth that Christ is enough for you, that you will make it through, you endure and rejoice in suffering because Christ is enough!

Anybody can declare how good God is when the kids succeed, and the money is right and the body is healthy. But our God gives us the gift of setbacks and problems for us to say to the world, "the joy of the Lord is my strength."

Listen – In Christ, a good and gracious God intends these problems and setbacks to be opportunities. Will you ask God to help you?

God Intends the Gospel to be Clear

Let's rejoin the story. Paul is giving his testimony and in v. 16-18, the resurrected Jesus is telling Paul what the Gospel does. Let's read v. 16-18 for context and pay close attention to v. 18. *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.*"

You see what Jesus says about Paul? "I'm sending you to open their eyes." Why open their eyes? Because the unbelieving world is blind to the truth of Jesus Christ. Darkness isn't strange to people born blind. Darkness is a native land, that is, until your eyes are opened. And where there is spiritual blindness, people are at home in their sin and our job is not to tell them how much we hate the darkness they're in. Our job is to shine the light of Christ on their dark worlds.

Paul told the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 4:4, *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* But notice the reason for showing the light of Christ right there in v. 18: *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.*"

This is nothing short of a radical transfer of allegiance. This is a liberation from the darkness of satanic rule, this is a liberation to the place of God's marvelous light. That's how Paul describes becoming a Christian in Colossians 1:13: *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,*

This is where I want to speak to those of you who are not believers or you who are not living like believers.

Several people were baptized today. That baptism didn't save them. It was a symbol of what Christ has done in them spiritually – from being spiritually dead, they were made alive. From being in the darkness, they were brought to the light of Christ. From being thoroughly sinful, they were forgiven by God's grace in Christ. From being once far off from God, they were brought near by the blood of Christ.

And for you, the point of the whole sermon is to show you: Christ is better than whatever pride or addiction or success or fear is keeping you in the dark. God has created you in His image to live in the light of Christ. He lived perfectly, where you can't. He was righteous and died as a substitute to satisfy God's justice. God raised Him from the dead in victory. Your response is to believe and give yourself to a life of commitment to Christ.

(Pastor prays)