

GOSPEL/ ALMOST PERSUADED

A Gospel message by George Bates. The Meeting House. Randalstown. Co., Antrim. Northern Ireland. UK.

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READING :- ACTS 25:13–16

I want the Word of God to do the work tonight, as we build up a vivid picture, of one of the most unforgettable scenes in the Holy Scriptures.

*Let's take up the story, in the **Book of the Acts 25:13**, where we see a private arrangement being agreed, by "**people in high place**".*

Now read Acts 25:13–16, ...

"And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him."

Verse 22 "Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him."

*Now the spotlight of the Scriptures turns upon **A POMPOUS ASSEMBLY** in verse 23*

"And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth."

*This is a real show of inflated grandeur, as "the red carpet goes out," in "**the place of hearing**" for king Herod Agrippa II, and his sister Bernice, and the Governor Porcius Festus himself.*

There is an ancient Roman Theatre at beautiful sun drenched Caesarea, right on the white sandy shoreline of the Mediterranean sea.

It's an arena that was used for blood sports, and drama, and spectacles, with a rising gallery of tiers of semicircular rows of seats, all facing the ocean, in a rainbow shape.

There is a special V I P area, like a Royal Box, positioned right in the middle of the gallery, where the upper crust of society would have sat, in all their glory.

*The Israeli guides will tell you that this was "**the place of hearing**" mentioned here in verse 23.*

It certainly is a most impressive sight to behold, that's for sure.

***A PRIVATE ARRANGEMENT, ... A POMPOUS ASSEMBLY**, we have what only can be called **A POLITICAL ADDRESS**, as Festus gives "**a cover-up reason**" for this present function,*

In verses 24-27, "And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him."

*Also read **Ch.26:1a** "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself."*

Agrippa is a man of fewer words, and wants to get straight into the proceedings!

*Now in the following verses, we have **A PRISONER'S ANSWER**, as the Apostle Paul is brought out of a prison, where he has been held in chains, for well over two years.*

*To make his defence against the charge of crimes of sedition, and of profaning the Temple, and being a Christian leader of a sect called “**the Nazarenes**”.*

This charge was falsely brought against him by the High Priest, Ananias, and the Chief Priest, and Elders and all their council.

AND THIS IS THE FIFTH TIME IN A ROW THAT PAUL HAS BEEN CALLED TO MAKE HIS DEFENCE BEFORE AN AUDIENCE, OVER THESE PRESENT CHARGES.

- *First to a violent uproar of the Jews in Jerusalem.*
- *Then to Ananias, the High Priest, and Jewish Council.*
- *Next to Felix, to the Roman Governor at Caesarea.*
- *Then to Festus, who took over the Governorship.*
- *And now to Herod king, Agrippa and his sister Bernice.*

I can almost see him blinking his tired eyes, in the strong sunlight, and straightening himself up.

*Then Paul begins to give a personal account of how he made contact with the Risen Lord Jesus Christ Himself, **verses 9-29***

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”

What a soul stirring moment this really is! A moment that has gripped my heart!

*As the Lord Jesus Christ's “**courageous servant**” Paul, is a prisoner in chains, standing before the King and rulers of his people, seeking with every fibre of his being, (in his physical weakness and*

humiliation), to get it over to these people, that Jesus Christ, his Saviour is truly alive!
And that he really has met Him, and has seen Him, and has had conversations with Him!

Is it not absolutely clear to you, that this man has no doubts whatever, concerning the chain of events, that led him into contact with the Risen Living Saviour?

Paul said in one of his Divinely inspired letters to Timothy, (his son in the faith), **"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able, to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day". II Timothy 1:12**

He reminds me of the man who was blind from birth, that we read about in **John ch.9**.
You'll remember, I'm sure, how that Jesus spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man, and said unto him, **"Go wash in the Pool of Siloam"**. **"He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing"**.

Now came a surprising reaction.

This really upset the neighbours, for they began arguing whether he actually was the Blind Beggar, or just some other fellow that resembled him!

Some said **"he's like him"**, others said **"it is him"**, of course, he soon told them **"I am he"**.

Then the religious Pharisees got upset, because they hated Jesus, and argued that He couldn't possibly have done this miracle.

So they said that the man was never blind in the first place.

Then his parents were upset, because the Pharisees put them "on the spot", about how this miracle occurred.

But they said **"He is of age, ask him"**.

"He is our son and he was born blind", ("that's all we know").

For they knew that if they told the truth, that it was Jesus Christ that made him see, then they would be put out of the Synagogue.

So the blind man looked at them, with his brand new eyesight, as if they were all daft, and said, **"One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see"**. **John 10:25**

Nobody was talking him out of that.

Our wonderful Saviour then made it clear, that there was a Spiritually symbolic application, to the blind man's new condition.

And Jesus said, **"For judgement I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind"**.

Not physically, but Spiritually.

Listen dear unsaved friend, the Living Saviour wants to perform
AN OPTICAL OPERATION in your life tonight! He wants to open your eyes to the truth.
To the darkness that has the grip of you and the Hell that lies before you!
To your need of the Wonderful Saviour, who is waiting to save you.

His desire concerning you, hasn't changed one blink, since the day that He stopped this Christ rejecter and despiser, on the road to Damascus.

*And made him **"a chosen vessel"**, to carry the glorious Gospel to us, the Gentiles.*

*As the dreaded persecutor was in full flight, in a frenzy of hatred against Christians, who were meeting at Damascus, he was **"Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"**, we are told in Acts ch.9.*

When suddenly, a light shone from Heaven, above the brightness of the blazing noon day sun. Acts 26:13, "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me."

Frightening the animals, and causing the whole crowd of men to fall to the ground.

Acts 26:14-15, "And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

***"Saul Saul why persecutest thou me?"**. **"Who art thou Lord?"**.*

***"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest"**. **"Lord what wilt thou have me to do?"**.*

He yielded his heart and life to the Saviour that day.

Now as the glorified Lord Jesus, speaks on with Saul, He tells him that He has appeared unto him for the purpose of sending him as a soul winner to the Gentiles.

That's us, the non-Jewish Nations at large.

The Saviour is saying, "I'm going to take you and make you mine, and then I'm going to use you, to tell others about me".

Wouldn't it be wonderful, if the Risen Lord, in our midst, would do that with a soul in this meeting tonight?

Now what is the desired effect, that Jesus our Lord wants to take place in your life, as a result?

In Acts 26:18 Jesus Himself tells us the whole purpose of the Gospel message.

- 1. **"To open their eyes"**.
You need AN OPTICAL OPERATION.
- 2. **"To turn them from darkness into light"**.
You need A DIFFERENT DIRECTION.
- 3. **"And from the power of Satan unto God"**.
You need A DIVINE DELIVERANCE.
- 4. **"That they may receive forgiveness of sins"**.
You need A PEACE PROVIDED by Christ's sacrifice.
- 5. **"And inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me"**.
You need A HEAVENLY HOME.

A PRESENT POSSESSION leading to A FUTURE FULFILMENT.

You need to come away from this state that you are in tonight, of being “almost persuaded”, but stuck!

And allow the Risen Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ to open the eyes of your faith in Him.

*So that you will be able to say “**One thing I know that whereas I was blind now I see**”.*

He can work the miracle of the new birth, if you’ll repent before God for your sins and receive His only begotten Son Jesus as your only Saviour and Lord.

Listen, dear unsaved soul, you may, or may not, have perfect vision physically, but that’s not the thing that is in question here.

There are those who have no physical eyesight at all, like the little company of believers in “The workshops for the Blind”, who asked me to come and preach to them, on their lunch break. Some of them were totally blind, but they were as sure as Heaven, as if they were already in it!

*But other people have absolutely perfect vision optically, and yet they will one day “**Lift up their eyes in Hell being in torments**”, like the unsaved rich man that our Lord Jesus told us about in **Luke’s Gospel account ch.16**.*

*If you describe some object to a blind person then he will reply “**I can’t see it**”, and that’s what you are saying about the things of God!*

No one can understand God’s truth, until their Spiritual eyes have been opened, by the Lord!

*We are taught in the Scriptures, in the book of **II Corinthians 4:3–4**, “**But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost in whom the (false), god of the world (the devil), hath blinded the minds of them which believe not (Satan blinds unsaved minds)**.”*

Why?

*“**Lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them**”.*

The Devil is determined to take you to Hell, using Mental blindness and Spiritual darkness of soul! But he knows that the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ can save you, and the Devil is afraid of it.

It’s not God’s will, for a poor sinful soul, to drift through their existence on earth, no matter how religious or affluent that existence may be, in an “almost persuaded” but stuck state!

Bemoaning all those wasted years of uncertainty, anxiety, mental depression, Spiritual oppression and fear and regrets.

ARE YOU ALWAYS QUESTIONING GOD?

- “I can’t see why I am a sinner”.
- “I can’t see why my loved one had to die”.
- “I can’t see why I’m unemployed”.
- “I can’t see why I had to be the one to have this affliction.”
- “I can’t see what’s wrong with a booze up”.
- “I can’t see why my marriage is on the rocks”.

“Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God”.

*I believe that someone here has known great sorrow in their life.
Did you get a raw deal in your opinion?
Have you had a nervous breakdown?
Have you only a very short time left to live?*

*Don't remain in that pitiful state of uncertainty and sin a moment longer.
Repent of your sins and believe Christ's Gospel promises.*

*John 10:9, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."
John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."*

The Saviour will illumine the eyes of your understanding, when the Spirit of truth takes the Word of God and open the Eyes of Faith in your heart!

*Jesus says, “**Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free**”.*

Read Acts 26:22-23, "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."

Paul had the absolute assurance of the Word of God for his faith to lay hold of!

*Our Lord Jesus Christ now wants you **to know** that you are saved.*

Our Lord Jesus wants A DIFFERENT DIRECTION for your existence.

*He wants you to “**Turn from darkness and come into His marvellous light**”.*

Turn from that Hell-bound path that you are treading.

He has a brand new life for you.

*A glorious future in His will, but “**Ye must be born again**”. There is no alternative way!*

*Maybe you are saying “I would love to be saved, but the devil has me chained and bound by sin”,
Praise God, “**If the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed**”.*

*The Risen Saviour said “**All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth**”.*

*There is a wonderful “**DIVINE DELIVERANCE**” for you, no matter how much the enemy resists.
Satan to Jesus must bow!*

*Think of the Demoniak at Gadara's Graveyard on the shores of beautiful blue Galilee, who has just come “**From the power of Satan unto God**”.*

*Think of the Legion of Demons entering into 2000 hulking great pigs and driving them out of their tiny minds, down the hillside and into the Sea to “**choke**” to death, as in a frenzy their tiny legs seek to paddle the waters to stay afloat cutting their own hanging throats in the process! and the man is now delivered from these Demons and clothed and in his right mind.*

God wants you to know that DIVINE DELIVERANCE.

“Would you be free from your burden of sin, there's power in the blood of the lamb”.

“Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool”.

God wants to be merciful and gracious unto you, and He has forgiveness in His heart for you, if you will repent of your sins tonight, and embrace by faith His own dear Son as your Saviour.

You can have PERFECT PARDON and peace with God.

But it can only be obtained at the old blood soaked Cross of shame, where Jesus sacrificially shed His blood to make an atonement, through His death, for our sins and iniquities.

“That they might receive forgiveness of sins”.

The Risen Lord wants you to know that forgiveness.

*You can have “**Peace with God**” as your vilest sins, ...your secret sins, and all your guilty sins, are blotted out, the moment that you repent and turn to the Son of the Living God.*

The power “Of Christ’s Gospel, will not only turn you from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, but you will receive forgiveness of sins and a place reserved in Heaven for you”.

A HEAVENLY HOME, to meet your loved ones on that other shore.

Can I tell you something special?

This Apostle is not only speaking out in his own defence just now, but he has A DUAL PURPOSE in his mind.

1. *Jesus is really alive and present.*
2. *You are almost persuaded but STUCK!*
3. *You need to come from being “almost persuaded,” to the state of being “fully persuaded” tonight.*
4. *This Gospel is for deep dyed scarlet sinners of the worst condition, as well as good clean respectable unsaved folk.*

These curious Rulers are beginning to realise that there is a greater power interested in the proceedings, and He is not sitting with them in the Royal Box but He has turned the Royal Box into the Dock at this trial, and it’s not just Paul the prisoner being examined before Agrippa and Bernice; but Agrippa and Bernice being examined before God.

And if I can take you a step further in your thinking, the same Holy Spirit of God who searched their hearts that day, unseen by mortal eye, is examining your mind and soul, and recording your response just now, whether you realise it or not.

“Thou art not far from the Kingdom ”
but “What shall you do then with Jesus which is called Christ?”.