

“True and Rational Words” (Acts 25-26)

August 28, 2016

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It's very easy to assert a claim. It's a lot harder to make an argument, or case, for some idea and back it up with evidence. To assert something is to say forcefully that something is a fact. To assert something is to make a truth claim. Those claims could be about God or another person. They could even be accusations. It's easy to say, for example, that someone is a bigot without actually demonstrating that such a claim is true. It's a lot harder to defend that claim, to make a case that supports it, and to offer evidence that supports the claim.

This has been on my mind a bit this week. Earlier in the week, a Facebook friend sent me a link to a video. About three months ago I mentioned that I had met a young man on a plane and we had a four-hour conversation about God and life. We became friends on Facebook and he sent me this video because he thought I would be interested in it. The video featured a 13-year-old named Max talking about science and God.¹ In the video, this young teenager answers some questions. Apparently, he is rather precocious and is something of a scientific genius. Or so he claims. He claims that he has already solved the world's energy problems, and all he needs is support in order to make his proposed solution a reality. I have no idea if any of this is true. I remain highly skeptical. There's no evidence that this kid has the world's energy problems solved.

Then, in the video, this teenager starts to talk about God. He claims that God is energy. He says that God is not a person, but an “it,” an impersonal force. He also says God is all and is us. In other words, he believes in pantheism. He offers no evidence, no argument. He just asserts this is the truth. Then he states that the Bible doesn't have any “factual evidence” behind it. Again, he doesn't really make a case. He offers no evidence. He just states his opinion as if it's truth.

All of this has been on my mind because also this week I saw an article that stated, more or less, that Christians who hold biblical views on sexuality and marriage are on the wrong side of history.² That's an easy claim to make, but it's a lot harder to make a real case for such a

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ0rJx914qE>.

² David Gushee, “On LGBT Equality, Middle Ground Is Disappearing,” *Religion News Service*, August 22, 2016, <http://religionnews.com/2016/08/22/on-lgbt-equality-middle-ground-is-disappearing> (accessed August 27, 2016). A great response to Gushee's article is Jake Meador, “On David Gushee's Dishonesty,” *Mere Orthodoxy*, August 24,

claim. In order to do that, you would have to define what “history” is, and what being on “the wrong side” of it looks like. And you’d have to know the future, and you’d have to define a period in history from which you would look back, and say, “Those people are wrong.” But who’s to say that the people who seemed to be wrong wouldn’t be vindicated in the future? Fifty years from now, people might say, “They are wrong.” But one hundred years from now, people might say, “Hey, they were right after all!” When you stop and think about it, it’s really hard to prove that anyone is on the wrong side of history. It’s a lazy assertion to make.

And the real reason I have been thinking about this is today’s passage. Today, we’ll be looking at Acts 25 and 26. This passage follows on the heels of last week’s passage, which showed Paul being accused by his fellow Jews of doing things contrary to the Old Testament. They also accused him of being a threat to the Roman Empire, because they claimed he was causing a riot. More to the point, they really wanted to silence Paul because he was telling anyone with ears to hear about Jesus. Some people hated that message and wanted to silence it. (That’s still true today.) Because people wanted to kill Paul in Jerusalem, he was taken into Roman custody. And when word got out that some Jews had made a plot to kill Paul in Jerusalem, he was taken to Caesarea, which is where the Roman governor of Judea was headquartered. Last week, we saw that the governor at the time, Felix, couldn’t find Paul guilty of breaking any law. But he kept Paul in prison for two years, as a favor to Paul’s Jewish opponents, to keep him from preaching in public.

This week, we see that the next Roman governor of Judea, Felix’s successor, a man named Festus, tries to figure out what to do with Paul. Paul is once again accused of wrongdoing, though Paul’s accusers can’t offer any proof of their accusations. We see that Paul, however, is able to offer evidence for Christianity. His main evidence for the faith is that Jesus rose from the grave, and that Jesus appeared to Paul.

So now, without further ado, let’s start to look at this week’s passage. We’ll begin by reading Acts 25:1–5:

¹ Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ² And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, ³ asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an

2016, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/persistent-dishonesty-progressive-evangelicals-religious-liberty-debates> (accessed August 27, 2016).

ambush to kill him on the way. ⁴ Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵ “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.”³

As I said earlier, Paul had been in prison in Caesarea for two years. He hadn’t done anything wrong, but he had caused a great deal of unrest in Jerusalem and the governor left him in prison as a favor to his Jewish opponents. After two years, Felix was replaced by a man named Porcius Festus. This was probably in the year 59. (Though it’s possible this is now AD 60.) After only three days in Judea, Festus went to Jerusalem. While he was there, the Jewish leaders—the chief priests and “the principal men”—told him about Paul. They probably repeated the accusations that were previously made against Paul: They said Paul caused riots among the Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire and that he tried to profane the temple in Jerusalem by bringing a Gentile into it (see Acts 24:5–6). Neither charge was completely true. Here, the Jews tell Festus to bring Paul back to Jerusalem, probably to put him on trial in front of the Sanhedrin, the council of Jewish leaders. But what these men really wanted to do was plan an ambush to kill Paul on the way. This is exactly what they wanted to do two years earlier (see 23:12-15). Festus doesn’t agree to the plan. Instead, he tells the Jewish leaders to go to Caesarea, where Paul is. If they have charges to make against Paul, let them make them there. Because a new governor was in power, Paul was going to be put on trial again.

Let’s see what happens next. We’ll read verses 6–12:

⁶ After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷ When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. ⁸ Paul argued in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” ⁹ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” ¹⁰ But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. ¹¹ If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” ¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Now in Caesarea, Paul is ordered to appear before the governor. Paul's accusers come and bring "many and serious charges against him that they could not prove." They are trying to convince the governor that Paul is a threat to the Roman Empire, one that needs to be snuffed out. But they can't prove what they are saying, because their accusations are false. It's easy to assert that Christianity is a threat to a country, or bad for people, or whatever. But it's very hard—actually, I would say it's impossible—to prove such a thing. In the face of these accusations, Paul maintains his innocence.

We get the sense that Festus doesn't really care what the truth is. He is simply interested in politics. He wants to do the Jewish leaders a favor, probably to gain their goodwill and to keep the peace. So Festus asks Paul if he wants to be put on trial in Jerusalem. Paul is no fool. He knows that if he goes back to Jerusalem, he could be killed. So he says that he is a Roman citizen and he's right where he should be: in front of the Roman governor. He says that if he is guilty, he won't try to escape the death penalty. But if his accusers can't prove their charges, he shouldn't be handed over to them. Then, to make sure he doesn't fall back into the hands of the people who want to kill him, he appeals to Caesar.

In certain situations, Roman citizens had the right to appear before Caesar, the emperor himself. Paul knew this and he uses it to his advantage. He didn't want to die in Jerusalem. And, as we saw in chapter 23, Jesus himself told Paul that he was going to go to Rome (23:11). Perhaps Paul thought, "If I go back to Jerusalem, I'll die there. Here is a way that I can be sure I'll get to Rome. I'll demand that I deserve a trial in front of the emperor. That way, I'll get to preach the gospel to Caesar and all of Rome." Festus knows that Paul has this right, so he agrees.

But before Paul travels to Rome, he gets the opportunity to preach to another political leader. This time, it's the Jewish king, Agrippa II. Agrippa was the great-grandson of Herod the Great and the son of Agrippa I, who died in Acts 12. He was born in Rome and the Roman leaders regarded him favorably. He was given the kingdom of Chalcis (in modern-day Lebanon) by the emperor Claudius in the year 50. Later he exchanged that kingdom for the same territory that his father ruled over, as well as parts of Galilee. He also had power over the temple in Jerusalem, and was given the right to appoint the Jewish high priest. Though Agrippa wasn't the ruler of Judea, he was the highest-ranking Jewish ruler in the area, and he had come to Caesarea to pay his respects to the new Roman governor. When Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, visit Festus, Festus tells them about Paul. We read about this in verses 13–22:

¹³ Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. ¹⁴ And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. ²¹ 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." ²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him."

Here's an interesting note about Agrippa and Bernice, his sister: Bernice had been married to their uncle, who had previously been king of Chalcis. After her husband died, Bernice lived with Agrippa. There was a rumor that they had an incestuous relationship. Whether this was true or not, we don't know. But later, well after this time, she had an affair with the Roman governor and then emperor, Titus. It wasn't uncommon for various rulers at this time to live very immoral lives. We shouldn't think that the presence of corrupt leaders is something new to the world. Paul had to deal with these people, and he did so with respect.

More important for us is the observation that when Jesus initially appeared to Paul, he said that Paul would represent Jesus "before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Paul has already told Israelites and Gentiles about Jesus. He has appeared before some Gentile rulers. Now he's about to appear before a Jewish king. Before his life is over, Paul will appear before the highest political ruler on earth, the emperor.

Before Paul testifies to Agrippa, Festus recounts the case of Paul to the Jewish king. Perhaps Festus mentions Paul because he finds this case interesting. Perhaps he mentions it to Agrippa because he realizes the real issue is not Roman law but a theological dispute. In that case, he may want Agrippa, as a Jew, to weigh in on this issue. (Later, we'll see that Festus wanted Agrippa's help in explaining the whole Paul situation to the emperor.) Festus rightly identifies the whole reason that Paul is in trouble. He says that the charges against Paul weren't "such evils as I supposed." He probably assumed that Paul was being charged with treason. No,

the real issue was, as he says in verse 19, “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.” The reason Paul was in trouble was that he told people about Jesus. He told them that Jesus was the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed King, the Son of David, whose coming was promised in the Old Testament. Jesus, as this King, was not only a man, but he was and is also God. He added a second nature to his divine nature, becoming man, in order to live the perfect life that no other human has lived. In other words, Jesus came to fulfill the role that God had designed for human beings—to love and live for God. Only Jesus has done this perfectly. Yet though Jesus was innocent, he died in the place of sinners. He purchased their freedom from sin and death by taking on their sin and having it put to death on the cross. And the proof that Jesus paid for sin and is the Son of God is that he rose from the grave. The resurrection was when Jesus rose from the grave in an indestructible, immortal body. And it was the center of Paul’s message. The good news is that one day all Christians will rise from the grave in bodies that have been transformed, bodies that are perfect, and they will live in a restored, perfected world with God forever.

This news about Paul intrigues Agrippa, so he says, “I would like to hear the man myself.” And that wish is granted on the very next day. Let’s read about that in verses 23–27:

²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. 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. ²⁷ For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.”

Festus’s words here seem to be a bit over the top. He says that “the whole Jewish people petitioned” him about Paul. But Paul himself was Jewish and there were many Jewish Christians. But he does get one issue right: Paul’s enemies thought “he ought not to live any longer.” Festus also says something very interesting and very important. He says, “I found that he had done nothing deserving death.” Agrippa will later say the same thing. It’s interesting, once again, to see the parallels between Jesus and Paul. In Luke’s Gospel, it’s King Herod Antipas who says he wants to see Jesus (Luke 23:8). And in the case of Jesus, neither Pontius Pilate nor Herod found

Jesus guilty (Luke 23:14–15, 23). Luke clearly wants us to see that Jesus was innocent, and he wants us to see that Paul was innocent. Both were falsely accused because people were hostile to the Christian faith. Paul is following in the footsteps of his master.

We also learn from these verses that Festus didn't know how to report the case of Paul to his "lord." He means the emperor. He is hoping that Agrippa can help him figure out what to write to explain why Paul would appeal to the emperor, particularly since Paul seems innocent. The emperor was starting to be called "lord" at this time, but the true Lord is Jesus.

So Agrippa asks Paul to present his case. This is not a trial, since Paul is already bound for Rome. Agrippa simply wanted to hear what Paul had to say for himself. So, Paul gives a long speech. Some of this speech repeats Paul's conversion story. Since we have already encountered that in Acts 9 and 22, I won't explain all the details again. But before I read parts of the speech, I want us to see that Luke tells us that it's a defense. In this case, Paul is not defending primarily *himself*. No, Paul is defending *the gospel*. He does say that he is defending himself against the accusations of his Jewish opponents. But his main point seems to be to persuade Agrippa to come to faith in Jesus.

Let's first read verses 1–8:

¹So 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, ³especially 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. ⁵They 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. ⁶And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷to 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! ⁸Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

Paul says that Agrippa is familiar with both the customs and the controversies of the Jews. He then recalls his former life. Paul was a member of the sect of Jews known as the Pharisees, who strictly observed the law that God gave to the Israelites. They also obeyed later oral traditions, added to the written law. The Pharisees believed in the future resurrection of the dead, in which the righteous would live forever and the unrighteous would be condemned (Dan.

12:2). Paul says that he is really on trial because he has hope in the promise God gave to their forefathers. In other words, Paul says his hope is in eternal life. Why is it that his Jewish opponents think it's so odd that God can raise someone from the dead? God promised that much in Ezekiel 37. He promised that in Daniel 12. And if God can create the universe out of nothing and humans out of basic elements, he can bring the dead back to life.

In the next part of the speech, Paul says that he was initially against Jesus and Christianity. He even approved the deaths of Christians. Let's read verses 9–11:

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.

Paul was willing to hunt down Christians in foreign cities. But when Paul was on his way to Damascus, to arrest Christians bring them back to Jerusalem where they would certainly die, Jesus himself appeared. Paul speaks about this in verses 12-18:

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, ‘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.’

Since Paul persecuted Christians, he was persecuting Jesus. What's interesting is the saying that Jesus says to Paul: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” This was a proverb used in this time. A goad is a spiked stick used to motivate cattle to move. There was no sense in fighting it. What Jesus said to Paul was that it was useless for him to resist God. To fight against God was to fight against reality. That's what fighting against Christianity is. When people reject Jesus, they

are rejecting the one true God. And God is the ultimate being, the “really real,”⁴ the foundation of all truth. Resisting Jesus is like jumping off a building in an attempt to resist gravity. Those who reject Jesus will find that they are on the wrong side of history—and the wrong side of God.

Jesus told Paul that his job was to “open [the] eyes” of Jews and Gentiles, “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” Jesus. That is reality. We all start out in the dark, part of a kingdom that is ruled by Satan. When God calls his people to himself, he brings the message of Jesus to them. He opens up their eyes so they can see the truth of their condition: they are separated from God because they have turned from him. He also opens their eyes to see who Jesus is: God in human flesh, who is so eager to rescue his people that he endures suffering and shame and dies so that they don’t have to be condemned for their sins. The only thing that people need to do to turn from the darkness to the light is to trust in Jesus. That means believing he is who the Bible says he is, trusting that his death and resurrection opened up the way to a relationship with God, and following his teaching.

Paul’s life was completely transformed when he saw Jesus. He then went and told people, first in Damascus, but later in Jerusalem and even throughout the Roman Empire, that people should turn from their old way of life and turn to God. And that’s why some Jews wanted to kill him. Let’s read verses 19–23:

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.”

Paul says he obeyed the “heavenly vision” of Jesus. In other words, by telling others about Jesus, he was obeying God. He affirmed what the Hebrew Bible says. He said “nothing but what the prophets and the 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

⁴ James W. Sire calls the ultimate or prime reality “the really real” in *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 22.

Gentiles.” Paul is drawing heavily on words found in Isaiah (42:6–7; 49:5-7, for example). It’s possible that Paul actually presented these Scriptures in his speech. Scholars agree that in Acts, we are given summaries of the actual speeches. It’s reasonable to assume that the actual speeches were much longer. Paul’s whole point is that what he was doing was God’s will: The God-man, Jesus, appeared to Paul, God helped him preach the gospel, and this gospel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

It’s at this point that Paul is interrupted by Festus, who thinks that what Paul is saying is crazy. Paul says that he is not crazy. What he says is true and rational. He is talking about real events that have been witnessed by real people. What happened to Jesus in his death and resurrection didn’t happen in the dark, in some corner. His death was public and after he rose from the grave, he appeared to hundreds of people. Let’s read verses 24–29:

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?” 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.”

Festus, a Roman, can’t understand what Paul is saying. What is this business about a dead man coming back to life? What is this about Satan and a kingdom of darkness? He thinks Paul has studied so much that he gone insane. But Paul knows the truth. His message is not his own. It comes from God, the maker of the universe, the maker of our minds, the one who makes thought and reasoning possible, whose mind is the basis of logic and mathematics, whose creation makes science possible. Paul says surely Agrippa has heard about Jesus. After all, what happened to him is public knowledge. Not only does the Bible testify to the existence of Jesus and his death, but so also do Roman historians. There were plenty of witnesses who saw Jesus die on a cross, a Roman instrument of torture and death. And Jesus appeared to many witnesses after he rose from the grave. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 15:6, that he appeared to over five hundred people.

When Paul turns to Agrippa and asks whether he believes the message of the prophets, who foretold what would happen to Jesus, Agrippa asks, “Would you persuade me to be a Christian in such a short time?” Paul says, “Whether it takes a short time or a long time, I want

all of you to be Christians.” Paul knew that people don’t always come to faith after one presentation of the truth. Sometimes, people need to hear the message of Christianity a number of times, from a number of different people, from different angles and perspectives. They need to ask questions and have them answered. Sometimes, this is a long process. But Paul was ready to testify to who Jesus is and what he has done because he saw Jesus. And he knew others who saw Jesus die and saw him alive again. Paul knew this was the truth. He was a witness.

At the very end of chapter 26, Agrippa, his sister, and Festus all recognize that Paul is not guilty of breaking Roman law, or any other law that would put him to death. If he had not appealed to Caesar, he could simply go free. Let’s read verses 30–32:

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.”

So, we’ve come to the end of today’s passage. As I always ask, what does this have to do with us?

What I want us to consider is the truth of Christianity. I realize that some people may react to the gospel in the way that Festus does. They may think our talk about a God who becomes man and dies in the place of sinners, who rises from the dead, who defeats Satan, is all crazy talk. I understand that. But to say Christianity is a myth, or a fairy tale, to say that it has no evidence behind it, is to make an assertion. It’s easy to write off Christianity as false. It’s a lot harder to make a case as to why it’s not true.

The fact is that Christianity is rational and true. The Christian worldview or philosophy is coherent. It presents a unified view of all of reality, one that contains no logical contradictions. Other worldviews can’t make that claim. Christianity is also backed by evidence.

First, let’s consider an historical claim. The man in chains here, Paul of Tarsus, is one of the most influential human beings who ever lived. His letters are some of the most-read documents the world has ever known. The same can’t be said for anything that Festus or Agrippa or Nero, the Caesar, wrote. They are mere footnotes to Paul’s story.

The reason why Paul is remarkable is that he was a Jewish man who believed in a transcendent God and who believed in the Old Testament law. Yet his beliefs changed. In general, the view of Yahweh, the God of Israel, in the Old Testament might be called a Unitarian view. There are hints that God is multiplicity of Persons in the Old Testament, but generally the

thought is that God is one simple Being. But in the New Testament, we understand that God is one compound Being. He is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. Shockingly, God became man and died. And worship practices changed. Instead of having to obey the Old Testament law, all that people had to do in order to be reconciled to God and worship him truly is to trust in Jesus. The special day of worship shifted from the Sabbath, Friday night and Saturday, to Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of the week that Jesus rose from the grave. How else can these changes be accounted for except for the fact that Jesus is who the Bible says he is?

The major piece of evidence for Christianity is the death and resurrection of Jesus. The topic is too vast to discuss now, but you can find more information about evidence for the resurrection on our website, wbcommunity.org, in the "Articles" section under the "Media" tab.⁵ To put in a nutshell, there are three basic facts of the resurrection. One, a remarkable man named Jesus of Nazareth died by crucifixion when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea. There are almost no scholars who deny that Jesus existed and died in that way, at that time. The second fact is that Jesus' followers claimed to have seen and even touched the resurrected Jesus. The third fact is that people who hadn't been followers of Jesus, people who had no hope that Jesus would come back from the dead, people like Paul, also had these experiences and their lives were completely changed. There are many other facts, of course. But these three basic facts are generally acknowledged to be true and can only be accounted for if Jesus actually rose from the dead in a real, tangible body.

Other religions simply don't offer this kind of evidence. Mormonism isn't supported by any archaeological or historical evidence. And in that story, an angel appeared to Joseph Smith alone and showed him tablets that only he could decipher. Islam says that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross. The Qur'an says, "They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; . . . they certainly did not kill him" (Sura 4.157).⁶ But the fact that Jesus died on the cross is one of the best-attested facts in ancient history. So Islam is certainly wrong.

If you are here today and you haven't yet repented, if you haven't turned from your old way of life, you may be thinking, like Agrippa, "In a short time [or a long sermon], would you persuade me to be a Christian?" However long it takes, I don't expect people to become

⁵ See <http://wbcommunity.org/evidence-resurrection-jesus-christ> and <http://wbcommunity.org/resurrection>.

⁶ The Qur'an, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65.

Christians without first exploring the evidence for the faith. If you want to know more, I would urge you to get on our website and listen to sermons about Jesus and read evidence for the Christian faith. I would urge you to talk to me. And I would urge you to turn from darkness to light, where you will find forgiveness, peace, and meaning in this life—and the next one.