

Call to Worship: Isaiah 60:1

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Sermon: "The Hope of the Promise" Acts 26:4-23

Benediction: Isaiah 26:19

"I beg you patiently to listen to me, as I say what the prophets and Moses said, that Christ would suffer and rise from the dead, which is speech true and reasonable, that you may be a Christian as I am."

Paul shows that the Jews are wrong to persecute him, for his beliefs and actions are perfectly in keeping with what they claim to believe. Paul shows that he is accused by the Jews for nothing more than his hope in the very promise made to the Jewish fathers.

Read the text: Acts 26:4-23

see two statements that the Jews are persecuting Paul for being true to their own religion

-(6-7)

-(21)

I. Paul's original unity with the Jews (4-12)

A. in nationality (4)

B. in upbringing right in Jerusalem (4)

C. in religion (5)

D. in hope of the promise

1. made by God to their fathers

2. to which the twelve tribes hope to attain as they worship night and day

3. which is the resurrection of the dead; that God would one day raise the dead back to life; this was the promise

4. yet it was for the sake of this very thing, Paul's hope in the promise of God made to the fathers, that Paul was accused by the Jews

5. Jesus of Nazareth, a man the Jews knew had come from God, because of the miraculous signs He did, was killed by crucifixion. But there were more than 500 Jews who all testified that they had seen him alive. But the Jewish leaders suppressed that testimony and substituted their story that Jesus' disciples had come in the night, overpowered the guards, and stolen the body from the tomb. Most of the Jews, then, including King Agrippa, found it incredible, unbelievable that Jesus could be alive after having been crucified. So they swallowed the story about His body being stolen. So the Jews persecuted Paul because he believed and preached that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, was had been raised from the dead by God. So Paul asks King Agrippa (verse 8), "Why should it be

thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?"

i. if someone put it to you, a Jew, "Has God ever caused anyone to be brought back to life?" you would answer, "Yes---Elijah brought the widow's son back to life."

ii. if someone put it to you, a Jew, "Has God ever promised to bring people back to life?" you would answer, "Yes---God gave Ezekiel a vision in which a whole valley of dry bones came back to life."

iii. if someone put it to you, a Jew, "Don't the Pharisees all believe in the resurrection of the body?" you would answer, "Yes---the Saducees deny it, but the Pharisees and most of the people believe in it."

APPLICATION: Here let us take up Paul's rhetorical question to answer some of our critics and even persecutors.

-we believe that because of the sin we committed in Adam long ago, people come into this world dead in trespasses and sins; we believe that with no regard to our will or our future choices or decisions, the Holy Spirit of God goes wherever He pleases and does a powerful work in the heart, bringing dead sinners back to life; granting a new birth; removing the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh; making the sinner a new creature

-for this we are accused by many of the church-going people around us

-so we ask, "Why should it seem incredible to you that God raises the dead?"

Didn't God raise the widow's son without regard to that boy's will or choices?

Didn't God raise the valley of dry bones without any of them making any choices?

Why, then, should it seem incredible to you, that God, by His grace, by His will, by His eternal decree, should raise sinners, dead in transgressions, to new life in Christ by His Spirit?

E. in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth

1. in Jerusalem

-shutting up many saints in prison by authority of the chief priests

-casting my vote against them when they were put to death

-punishing them often in every synagogue

-compelling them to blaspheme

2. in foreign cities

-in exceeding rage against them

-by authority and commission from the chief priests

-including my final such trip, to Damascus

II. Paul's continued unity with the Jews as to his heavenly vision (13-18)

A. A vision from heaven, and words of instruction from God in heaven, are not new ideas to the Jews. There are many such stories in the scriptures. So Paul is not stating something here that is a deviation from what his fellow Jews believe in, but something that is in keeping with it. The Pharisees even said as much in one of Paul's previous hearings---"What if he has seen a vision?"

B. Paul claims that God spoke to him in the person of Jesus, meaning Jesus obviously was raised from the dead (15)

C. What Paul says that Jesus told him to do in this heavenly vision was perfectly in keeping with the scriptures that the Jews believed---that the Jews and even the Gentiles would be brought to see the light and have faith in the one true God (17-18)

D. Anyone can claim to have seen a heavenly vision, but Paul had been empowered by God to do many miraculous signs to prove the truth of what he said about his heavenly vision

E. This heavenly vision, and the contents of it, are nothing the Jews should find objectionable; Paul is not claiming there anything that would be against the Jews or their religion

III. Paul's ongoing unity with the Jews as to his obedience to the heavenly vision (19-23)

A. Any Jew would agree that a person should be obedient to the commands given him in a vision from heaven; so Paul states that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; how could the Jews be opposed to that?!?

B. What Paul did in obedience to the heavenly vision was to go about preaching things that are perfectly in keeping with the Jewish religion

1. that people should repent, turning to God, and do works befitting repentance (22) (remember that John the Baptist had done that, and all the people considered him a prophet)
2. nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would come (22)
3. that the Christ would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead (23)
4. that the Christ would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (23)

APPLICATION: Let each of us who believes in Christ be assured that we believe only what every one of the faithful has believed since the beginning of the world. What Abel believed, what Noah believed, what Abraham believed, what David believed, what Nehemiah believed---we believe the same.

APPLICATION: We here, who, by God's grace have been brought to the Reformed Baptist churches, along with many others who are gathered today under other banners, but believing and worshipping according to the same truth, have this to say to those who criticise and oppose us: We are accused for believing nothing more than what God has promised to our fathers. We believe no more and no less than what the whole bible teaches to be true.

Some of us have come out of word-of-faith pentecostalism; now our friends and families pity us, or criticise us, or condemn us. Their preachers stand with bible in hand. They go from book to book reading many highlighted verses, accusing us of not believing the Word of God. We would say to them that we believe every one of those highlighted

verses. And we believe every one of the verses they do not have highlighted! They would say that we do not believe in speaking in tongues, that we quench the Holy Spirit, that we treat prophecies with contempt.

-We believe in speaking in tongues!

-We love the work of the Holy Spirit!

-We believe in prophecies!

Some of us have come out of Roman Catholicism; now our friends and families are concerned for us, thinking that we have left the true church and have rejected the true head of the church.

-We hold that the true church always has been made up of those who seek justification through faith in Christ, not by works; of this true church we surely are a part

-We agree that there is one man who is the head of the church, and that all controversies and questions are settled when He infallibly speaks; but the pope in Rome surely is not that head of the church, but is instead antichrist, for the head of the church is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ

Some of us have come out of today's Southern Baptistism. A number of us have been persecuted out of it. Now our friends pity us, or look down on us, or criticise us, or accuse us, or condemn us. To them we would say, "We believe in nothing but what the baptists in the South said from the colonial days of the late 1600s through the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, all the way to the first Baptist Faith and Message written in 1925. By God's grace we have learned the same truths of God's grace that were well known by Baptists in the south for hundreds of years. Learn your own history and find that we are true to what those Baptists believed and your present state of religion is a sad, weak perversion of the vigorous, well-grounded faith of better generations of the past.

We could continue down the list and speak to every group that would

"I beg you patiently to listen to me, as I say what the prophets and Moses said, that Christ would suffer and rise from the dead, which is speech true and reasonable, that you may be a Christian as I am."

I am thoroughly Jewish as to my nationality

I am thoroughly Jewish as to my upbringing

I am thoroughly Jewish as to my religion

I am judged by the Jews for the very hope of the Jews

Verse 6

Job 19:26

Acts 13:32

Acts 23:6

Acts 24:15

Acts 28:20

Clarke:

the hope of the resurrection of the dead

Henry:

Christ and heaven are the two great doctrines of the gospel - that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Now these two are the matter of the promise made unto the fathers. It may look back as far as the promise made to father Adam, concerning the seed of the woman, and those discoveries of a future state which the first patriarchs acted faith upon, and were saved by that faith; but it respects chiefly the promise made to father Abraham, that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, and that

God would be a God to him, and to his seed after him: the former meaning Christ, the latter heaven; for, if God had not prepared for them a city, he would have been ashamed to have called himself their God. Heb_11:16.

They look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, and this is what I look for. Why should I be looked upon as advancing something dangerous and heterodox, or as an apostate from the faith and worship of the Jewish church, when I agree with them in this fundamental article?

Verse 7

Clarke:

see similarity with Philippians 3:10-11

Verse 8

Henry:

Now many of his hearers were Gentiles, most of them perhaps, Festus particularly, and we may suppose, when they heard him speak so much of Christ's resurrection, and of the resurrection from the dead, which the twelve tribes hoped for, that they mocked, as the Athenians did, began to smile at it, and whispered to one another what an absurd thing it was, which occasioned Paul thus to reason with them. What! is it thought incredible with you that God should raise the dead? So it may be read. If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord of hosts? Zec_8:6. If it be above the power of nature, yet it is not above the power of the God of nature. Note, There is no reason why we should think it at all incredible that God should raise the dead. We are not required to believe any thing that is incredible, any thing that implies a contradiction. There are motives of credibility sufficient to carry us through all the doctrines of the Christian religion, and this particularly of the resurrection of the dead. Has not God an infinite almighty power, to which nothing is impossible? Did not he make the world at first out of nothing, with a word's speaking? Did he not form our bodies, form them out of the clay, and breathe into us the breath of life at first? and cannot the same power form them again out of their own clay, and put life into them again? Do we not see a kind of resurrection in nature, at the return of every spring? Has the sun such a force to raise dead plants, and should it seem incredible to us that God should raise dead bodies?

Verse 9

see John 16:2

Henry:

It is possible for those to be confident they are in the right who yet are evidently in the wrong; and for those to think they are doing their duty who are wilfully persisting in the greatest sin.