

Acts 25

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[0 : 00] It was an ad in Christianity Today. Christianity Today is an American journal. and the ad at the back was Shoes of the Fisherman. They were sandals that leave the greatest impression.

! \$19.95 per pair. And the idea is that you walk along the beach and you leave a message in the sand. So on one sandal there is a kind of raised impression of the name Jesus.

And on the other sandal is a raised impression with the word loves you. So as you walk up and down the beach you put one foot down and you put the other foot down and you walk up and down the beach all day and everyone on the beach gets the message Jesus loves you.

And the text that went along with this in the British one in Christianity Today was How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news? And the challenge of it was it was possible to get more corny what kind of impression do you want to leave?

Now it's really tacky isn't it? Really tacky. But actually it's a very good question. What kind of impression do you want to leave? And here is the Apostle Paul in this chapter and he's in the hands of the authorities he's on trial for his life and the Jews have tried to assassinate him they've tried to ambush him a few times and the Romans have taken him into protective custody for his own good and they don't know what to do with him so they pass the parcel with him.

[1 : 21] They shunned him from one to the other before finally sending him up to Rome first it's Felix 24 then it's Festus and then Festus brings in King Agrippa who comes up to Caesarea on a kind of courtesy call and then they ship him off to Rome to appear before the Emperor Nero they're great names aren't they?

Felix the cat Nero the dog they were the great names of those days weren't they? Felix and Nero we call our dogs and cats and we call our sons Paul it just shows you doesn't it?

there's a great reversal that's happened since the New Testament the names of the day were Nero he was Emperor in Rome Felix was the Governor of Palestine he was the worst Governor they ever had Felix was eventually summoned to Rome and was given a sack and now Festus now Festus is the guy who takes over Uncle Festus and anyway Paul makes quite an impression doesn't he? before these people Felix trembles we saw in the last chapter Agrippa says later on I am almost persuaded to become a Christian whether he's being sarcastic or not I'm not really sure but Paul made quite an impression upon him and this guy Festus loses his cool he blows his stack as I say he shouts at Paul just look over the page look at chapter 26 and verse 24 and as he was saying these things as he was saying these things in his defence Festus said to the loud voice Paul you are out of your mind your great learning is driving you out of your mind you're going insane now we're going to stay in chapter 25 but I think you'll agree I wanted to talk to David Baniel whether you'd be able to just shout at him in that way in the courtroom but it's pretty it's pretty out of order isn't it?

in a court of law the judge should not be shouting at the man in the dark and saying you're mad you're mad you're an idiot Paul made quite an impression in these circles as he's shunted from pillar to post and there are three sorts of people in verse 25 there's three attitudes of heart that I think are quite clear in Acts 25 attitudes towards the gospel the first thing is there is the hard heartedness of the Jewish leaders and I want you to be asking yourself as we look at this chapter what is the attitude of my heart?

[3 : 52] you may think this evening you can't possibly be hard hearted I can't possibly be hard hearted I wouldn't be in church would I? but let me tell you this it's very easy to be brought up in a good church and sit in a church week by week and to be as heart hearted as you like I know that I was like that I was proud and I was hard hearted as a teenager and we look at our hard heartedness the closed mindedness of these Jewish leaders then secondly we see the half heartedness and the double mindedness the half heartedness of firstness and then thirdly the

whole heartedness of the Apostle Paul so let's see the hard heartedness of the Jewish leaders and the key word here is the word against keeps cropping up it comes up it comes up twelve times in this chapter these men are against Paul and they are against everything that he stands for let me show you that very quickly let me look at verses 1 and 2 that were three days after Festus had arrived in the province he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea and the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul and they urged him asking us a favour against Paul they can't wait to get their hands on him can they?

you might have thought they'd have forgotten about him it's been two years we found out that from the reading at the end of 24 it's been two years in the last verse when two years had elapsed Phoenix was succeeded by Porcius Festus and desiring to do the Jews a favour Phoenix left Paul in prison so Paul was been rotting in prison for two years and you might have thought that was about time for the Jews to forget about him but Festus has not even had time to unpack his suitcases and they're knocking at the door look at verse 3 asking us a favour urgently requesting Festus to have Paul transfer to Jerusalem they're coming for Paul they carry out this vendetta against him and the tense of the verb in verse 3 is they keep on asking asking as a favour against him against Paul continually asking they won't take no for an answer and when you look at verse 3 you see what's motivating them isn't just a simply a concern for law and order what are they wanting at the end of verse 3 because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way they want this man dead and they don't care how it happens whether it's legally through a court of law or whether it's illegally through assassination they want Paul silenced and when Festus refuses to bring

Paul to Jerusalem do you notice verse 4 he invites them to Caesarea they don't waste any time at all verse 4 as soon as Festus gets back to Jerusalem the very next day they are there aren't they they're there again banging on the door 9 o'clock in the morning the very next day they can't even wait for the child to start to mob him they surround him they gang up on him and any charge will do as long as it'll stick can't you see that what you've got here is indiscriminate deep seated implacable hostility there's nothing reasonable about it oh look at verse 15 verse 15 they ask for the death sentence and when I was at Jerusalem the chief priests and the elders of the laws laid out their case against him asking for a sentence of condemnation against him but look at the way in which they ask him to be condemned I would have thought if you believe in the death penalty it's a very horrible thing isn't it you would be very serious about that but look at verse 24 Agrippa gives us a bit more information and Fester 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 are here shouting that he ought not to live any longer do you see the scene here they're being for blood aren't they Paul the prisoner is cool calm and collected and everyone else is angry everyone else is shouting at him his accusers are shouting at him and the judge is shouting at him Paul you're on your mind you are insane and the question is why is it why such anger why such hostility why such unreasonable implacable hatred towards Paul and the message that he preaches what lies behind it why are they so desperate to silence him why do they want him dead it's a strange thing but I think it's this it's psychologically proven isn't it that often people will accuse others unfairly and passionately of the very things that they themselves are guilty of won't they in fact the more unreasonable and the more angry they are the more likely they are to be guilty of the very thing that they are accusing other people of it's a phenomenon it's well recognised isn't it by psychologists so we live don't we in the days

I think it's beginning to die out a little bit but we live in the last five years in the days of angry atheists don't we have you met them the Dawkins Delusion isn't it oh goodness knows how many million copies there's dozens of those books aren't there if you go into the bookstore Christopher Hitchens book God Isn't Great some of us saw a really good video with Douglas Wilson and Christopher Hitchens have you still got it Chris probably somebody's borrowed it and not given it back it's a really good video but I came across this really interesting article when I was looking for that DVD this week about Professor Sir Anthony Flew does anybody know him Stuart that's encouraging Sir Anthony Flew was one of the biggest names in philosophy of his day he was behind logical positivism which you all know what that is but he was for years and years most of his career he was known as the world's most outspoken atheist and then he became a Christian believer let me read you what the article said one of the 20th most renowned atheists and influential philosophers has accused Richard Dawkins of the God delusion theme of being a secularist bigot and an amateur in

his use of academic scholarship he goes on to say this

[10:07] Professor Anthony Flew now 85 three years ago was for decades one of the world's foremost philosophical authorities his work was studied by hundreds of thousands of students it was his intelligence combined with his profound atheist views that led him to be one of the most foremost opponents proponents of Christianity in the western world his blistering attack on Richard Dawkins the Oxford Don comes just months after he shook the academic world by publishing the reasons that he the world's most notorious atheist had changed his mind he's written a book called There Is A God and this is what he says about Dawkins while he acknowledges the remarkable achievements of the God delusion in selling over a million copies he declares which is much more remarkable is that the contents or rather the lack of contents of this book shows Dawkins himself to have become what he and his fellow secularists typically believe to be an impossibility namely a secularist bigot secularist bigot you know what a bigot is?

a bigot is isn't it shout loud the argument's weak the argument is weak shout louder that's what a bigot does and the argument is weak so he just hurls insults did you see Stephen Fry on YouTube the other week just shouting his insults?

Christopher Hitchens' book God Isn't Great How Religious Poisons Everything listen to what Christopher Hitchens said about six years ago religion by its very nature compels people to behave cruelly and violently religion educates its children to hate unbelievers and its grown-ups to engage in slaughter and conquest in the name of God's glory religion obliges its true believers to restlessly circle the globe subduing peoples and nations until the whole world bows their knee and that is what people are saying about us that is the kind of opposition that is out there Christians are dangerous at least the fundamentalist ones are real Christians who believe the Bible are dangerous and that is why they are saying because according to Hitchens they hate people who disagree with them they are violent they are troublemakers these fundamentalists are a threat to our stable multicultural society and we're better off without them that is what some people are saying that is what the new atheists are saying although they're not new out there so if you regard yourself as a true Christian you are a violent hate filled murderous fundamentalist and the UK would be a better place without you you feel don't you like saying to these people about a God who doesn't exist you seem to protest too much why are you so angry about a God you don't believe in there's something else going on isn't there what is going on let me tell you what's going on there's a closed mindedness and there's a hard heartedness there so let's move on from the hard heartedness of the Jewish leaders there's nothing new under the sun there but notice secondly the half heartedness of Festus look at that look at verses 9 to 11 don't you love the apostle Paul verse 9 speaks to the judge verse 9 well Festus says if you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me

Paul said I'm standing before Caesar's tribunal where I ought to be tried to the dude I've done no wrong as you yourself know very well 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's nothing to their charges against me no one can give me up to them I appeal to Caesar it's pretty straight talking to the judge isn't it you can't set me up to Jerusalem I'm not prepared to go to Jerusalem and the point is the interesting thing do you notice Festus has changed his mind verse 4 and 5 he refuses three days after taking office he goes up to Jerusalem and the Jews want him to bring Paul to Jerusalem to stand a kind of show trial in Jerusalem and Festus refuses Festus 4 and 5 Festus is strong and firm isn't he no but in verse 9 he moots the idea with Paul would you like to go up are you willing to go up do you fancy a trip to Jerusalem Paul what was he thinking why the change of mind why this change of policy well because he's thinking by himself he's thinking if I can pull this off it looks very good on TV the clue is there in verse 9 isn't it what does he want wants to do the Jews a favour it's not about justice it's not about serving justice it's about serving his career in fact he was a very very good politician he only lasted two years in office then he died but whereas Felix is known as the worst ever governor they ever had

Festus is known as one of the best so he was a good guy in lots of ways but he was a double minded man he's not motivated by justice but by self interest what's good for me so whereas the Jewish leaders had closed their minds and hardened their hearts in truth Felix is double minded look at verses 18 to 20 Felix is talking to Agrippa verse 20 verse 18 when the accuser stood up they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I suppose rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion a certain Jesus who was dead but Paul asserted to be alive being

at a loss throughout how to investigate these questions I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and he tried there it's an interesting thing isn't it a dead man can't remember the details a dead man Jesus who Paul claimed was alive first I said I was at a loss I didn't know what he was talking about I was quite surprised it wasn't what I was expecting

[16:07] I looked through Roman legislation I couldn't find anything about resurrection I saw something about insurrection and how to deal with that but resurrection I had no experience with that I don't know how to deal with that in a court of law he's out of his depth he's clearly out of his depth he's not really that interesting in fact he's quite dismissive about it it's some dispute some superstition some finer point of doctrine some sect of the Jews about a dead guy Jesus who Paul says is alive shrugs it off but that is the issue isn't it that is the issue first he's put his finger on what the real issue is that is why the Jews are so angry and so murderous why because of the resurrection of Jesus it's because you see the resurrection of Jesus reverses the verdict of history they thought they got rid of him they thought they tossed him on the scrap heap like just one of the other dozens of messiahs so called who popped up there have been so many of them and they got rid of them and they thought that's the end of it and this Jesus whom you crucified

God has raised from the dead so where does that leave you no wonder they're so angry and if Jesus is alive you see from the dead then to live though he's dead well then who's the fool so if it really happened and this is just about 30 years after the event if it really happened that this man Jesus died and Paul says he came back from the dead and is alive you just can't shrug that off you can't shrug it off as some finer point of doctrine some philosophical discussion Paul insists he is on record isn't he saying in Corinthians that if you disprove the resurrection you dismantle Christianity because if Christ is not risen your faith is in vain your preaching is futile if Jesus died and did not rise then the apostle Paul says I'm a fool and so are you for being here tonight and Paul is saying I'm prepared to admit that but if he died and then he did come back from the dead then who's the fool now

Festus and you notice in verse 26 of chapter 26 he says to Festus and Agrippa this was not done this was something that was not done in a corner this is something Festus said can be investigated here is something that is on public record just 30 years down the track from when it happened and it's the best attested fact in human history Chuck Coulson he was involved in the Watergate scandal and he became a Christian while he was serving in prison he was in the White House this is what he said commentating on the 40 years Christ's disciples never backed down on their witness to the resurrection even to the point of martyrdom he said speaking about the Watergate scandal we couldn't hold our stories together for three weeks under that kind of pressure he said I was around the most powerful men in the world but we couldn't hold the lie and if the resurrection wasn't true those disciples could never have held out someone would have dug up the tapes or something or maybe something else maybe you're a fan of the Simpsons

I was told this afternoon I shouldn't talk about the Simpsons but I want to use this illustration those of you who watch the Simpsons and I'm not recommending it you might know of Lionel Hutz Lionel Hutz is the lawyer in the Simpsons and Lionel Hutz is based on a real life lawyer who is a very different character to the guy in the Simpsons Lionel Hutz is based on Sir Lionel who according to the Guinness Book of Records is the most successful lawyer ever he's apparently 245 consecutive murder acquittals which is pretty impressive isn't it but he became a Christian at the age of 64 and what persuaded him to change his mind was this dead guy called Jesus who Paul said was alive listen to what the world's most successful lawyer says he says I spent more than 40 years 42 years as a defence lawyer appearing in many parts of the world I can say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is so overwhelming that there is no room for doubt you see this is bomb in the building stuff isn't it isn't it let me explain that to you if I said to you tonight there's a bomb in the building you're obviously not convinced you because he's still sitting here but if I said there's a bomb in the building there's a bomb in the building and the flashing lights you start to see blue flashing lights and you hear a helicopter overhead and you start to hear silence coming up great and green and then some of the bomb disposal rush through those double doors of the back and they shout there's a bomb in the building you will not be sitting here for five minutes will you go for five seconds you'd evacuate the building straight away and the resurrection is that kind of message it is not some point of doctrine that the Jews are debating some guy Paul says he's dead but now he says it's a lie it is bomb in the building kind of stuff and if this man called Jesus died and came back from the dead if the tomb was empty in Jerusalem if this thing that was not dead in a

corner if this thing can be proven it's bomb in the building kind of stuff and you cannot go on thinking about your career festus if you only knew it actually you've got two years left in your career anyway you just can't shrug it off if there really is a bomb in the building then it's madness not to do anything about it and if

[22 : 04] Jesus really did rise from the dead that is what the Bible teaches and it's the heart of Paul's gospel then that means the end of the world has come round that we're now living in the last days that's what the resurrection signifies that's what the Jews believed the resurrection meant that is what Paul had in common with these Jewish leaders they believed that at the end of the age there would be resurrection of the dead and in Jesus that has happened and so you can't just shrug your shoulders and say oh that's interesting isn't it it's boring the building stuff and you cannot continue to be a Jewish leader and not recognise Jesus as the Messiah you cannot continue to be a career politician like Festus and put your career first as if Jesus had not been raised from the dead as the thirdly quickly at the wholeheartedness of the Apostle Paul it's such a contrast isn't it 2 verses 24 and 25 of chapter 26 it wasn't the first time and it wasn't the last time that

Christians were called mad your great learning is driving you out of your mind George Whitfield in June 1736 he was the great 18th century preacher really and he was preaching in the town of Gloucester he preached his first sermon in the first church he ever preached it was such a sermon that apparently 15 people were converted on the spot it was reported to the bishop somebody reported to the bishop that George Whitfield had driven 15 people mad to which the bishop replied I hope their madness lasts till next Sunday you see when somebody is converted when somebody believes in Jesus when somebody is born again and begins to take their religion seriously you are going to be accused of fanaticism Tim Keller in his brilliant book The Reason for God says people accuse us of fanaticism but the real problem with us as Christians is that we're not fanatical enough and that is the problem because if this dead guy Jesus came back from the dead and he is alive then we ought to be a lot more fanatical aren't we because that signals the end of the world that's the next thing on God's calendar it is judgment day and that is the significance of the resurrection the very fact that it hasn't happened yet is because

God is compassionate he doesn't want to be encouraged and he's giving the opportunity for the good news to get to the full corners of the world but the next thing that is going to happen in God's scheme of things is judgment he's served notice on the human race by raising this man Jesus from the dead and Paul says to the Athenians anyone who takes their Christianity seriously is going to be thought of mad remember Jesus Jesus' family thought they were mad let me remind you he's preaching in the house and such a crowd is gathered that him and the disciples aren't even able to eat and then he says when his family heard that that they came to take charge of Jesus because they thought he was going out of his mind isn't that strange here's a man who is so full of the will of God word of God he's so keen to do the will of God so zealous for the glory of God and he misses a meal and they say you're out of your mind he said your work colleagues what did you do last night I went to church and I worshipped God on a Sunday night they think you're out of your mind bizarrely there are some Christians who say you go to church on Sunday night they think you're out of your mind if Jesus is who he says he is and the resurrection proves his claim for right who's insane who's the fool so there are people out there they think that the height of madness is to miss a meal their God is their belly it's the height of fanaticism nothing more important than filling their stomachs at the proper hour and when they see someone for whom something is more important they say he is mad he's out of his mind this week I re-read briefly a book by Frankie Schaefer his parents Frank and Edith Schaefer started Labrie and they started this denomination and Frankie Schaefer has written a tragic book called Crazy for God and it's so sad because as you read it what you realise is

Frankie Schaefer was never converted and what Frankie Schaefer saw in his parents in his family he thinks was madness fanaticism fundamentalism but I want to say to you that is exactly what these people were saying to the apostle Paul in the verses 32 of chapter 26 the very last verse and Agrippa said to Festus this man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar what kind of nutcase is he he could have been his freedom if he had not appealed to Caesar they cannot understand what was making Paul what was motivating him what was making him tick why would he want to go to Rome of course the reason he wants to go to Rome do you know why the reason he wants to go to Rome is well look with me in Acts 23 verse 11 Acts 23 verse 11 Jesus told him certainly

[27 : 34] Acts 23 verse 11 and since I could not see because of the brightness of that light I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus that's not the right verse because I'm in the wrong chapter 23 verse 11 following night the Lord stood by him and said take courage for as you've testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem so you must testify in Rome so Paul wants to go to Rome Jesus told him you will go to Rome it's the centre of the world and there in Rome you'll appear before Nero and Nero will hear the gospel and not only will Nero hear the gospel but he was apparently never converted but the guard the praetorian guard the crack troops of the empire who were sent all around the world some of that praetorian guard were converted Paul tells us some of Caesar's own household believed in the Lord Jesus let me try and tie this together I want to ask you tonight what is your attitude to this message what makes you tick what motivates you I've got my grandfather's watch it's an old fashioned watch that ticks it's got a loud tick and the reason it's got a tick is because it's got a main spring in the watch your modern watch doesn't have one but you have a main spring in an old watch that makes it tick you have a main spring inside you which makes you tick as a human being what motivates you what makes you tick what makes you tick what drives you

I want you to think about that is it the gospel is it this message of a Jesus who was dead and is alive is that what motivates you and when it comes to this message you can sit in church and you can be hard hearted and closed minded like the Jewish leaders implacably hostile blindly prejudiced my mind is made up don't confuse me with the facts I doubt that is you because you wouldn't be here but there are people like that in churches but it's often more subtle listen to this quote by C.S. Lewis it's from the great divorce the scene is the borders of heaven and there's a lifelong searcher is being invited in this is what he's told I can promise you here is a man who's been searching all his life apparently I can promise you you've got to scope for your talents only for forgiveness for having perverted them no atmosphere of inquiry for I will bring you to the land not of questions but of answers and you will see the face of God ah says the man but we must all interpret those beautiful words that are our way for me there is no such thing as a final answer the free wind of inquiry must always continue to blow through the mind must it not listen says the white spirit once you were a child once you knew what inquiry is for but there was a time when you asked questions because you wanted answers and you were glad when you found them become that child again even now ah but the man says when I became a man I put away childish things no argument no appeal will avail against this infinite elasticity says C.S. Lewis the encounter already fruitless with the gentle surface ends with the gentle surface remembering an appointment making his apologies and hurrying off to his discussion group in hell there is more than one way to harden your heart you don't have to be mad and shouting and angry

C.K. Chaston said an open mind is like an open mouth you open it in order to shut it on food and on the truth you feed your mind in exactly the same way as you feed your body and there are people who sit in church and they will come to church and apparently they will be seeking for the truth and they're willing to discuss it but they never shut their mind on the truth there was a man called Jesus who died and rose again that is not philosophy that is not a religious belief that is a fact of history and it happened in time and in space and there were witnesses and it is one of the most important facts in history fasten your mind on that have you that is the crux isn't it either it's true or it's not are you hard-hearted closed-minded when it comes to the facts of the gospel are you half-hearted like festus you're here but your mind is somewhere else I know that's because the preaching is boring sometimes perhaps today you're thinking about your week your job your relationship your friends and this stuff is at the back of your mind and it just washes over you about Jesus being dead and then alive again you've maybe always believed that

I suppose it's at the back of your mind but if it's not at the forefront of your mind there's something wrong isn't there if the resurrection of Jesus Christ does not dominate us there is something wrong with us if your career is dominating you or your family or making money if that is what wakes you up on a Monday morning and not the fact that Jesus is alive from the dead well then you're half-hearted aren't you when it comes to the gospel when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus let me ask you tonight are you half-hearted or fully persuaded how are you committed to it like Paul has anybody ever called you a fanatic do people think you're mad what makes you tick what is driving you somebody said this week about IPC they were in a conversation with somebody else and they say sometimes I think that church is a cult and that conversation was reported back to me I was hopping mad and then I remembered the same allegation we made against the apostle

[33 : 25] Paul what's driving you blind prejudice hatred for the truth hostility self-interest or Jesus
alive from the dead of Christ!
love you I love you to be honest