

Acts 26:19-32

"Almost Persuaded"

Paul has been sharing his story; the reason behind his imprisonment, w/King Agrippa. & What a *testimony* Paul has! From murderous madman to passionate preacher of salvation by grace through faith in J.C. essentially in a single moment in time! He literally "saw the light" when Jesus Himself appeared to him as he was on his way to punish, imprison & put Christians to death in Damascus.

& Jesus told him (after he'd fallen to the ground) to rise & stand on his feet; for He had appeared to him for this purpose... to make him a minister & a witness. He was to serve the gospel & testify to the things he'd seen & the things that the Lord would reveal to him as he spent time *w/Him*, learning *of* Him, growing *in* Him. Jesus had a plan for Paul's life, & He has a plan for *your* life. & Though the details may vary, generally they're very much the same. God wants to use you to open the eyes of those who are blinded by sin. To turn them from darkness to light, & from the power of Satan to God. That they may receive forgiveness of sins & an inheritance (everlasting life) among those who are sanctified (set apart from sin/self) not through meritorious works or religious achievements, but by faith in J.C. This is the agenda of every believer; to turn hearts from the futility of this world to faith in Jesus resulting in the forgiveness of sins & everlasting life.

So there he is; Paul the prisoner, testifying to the truth of what's happened to him & why he finds himself in that place on that day. He's speaking before the governor, King Agrippa & all the who's who of that region being in *that* auditorium *at* that time.

The short of it is, "I saw the risen Jesus of Nazareth, shining in glory that was brighter than the noon day sun & He commissioned me w/this message!"

Vs 19-20

The essence here is; "I did the logical thing! J.C. appeared to me in glory, commissioned me to preach the gospel to a people who are in the dark being in bondage to sin & so I obeyed Him!" Ladies & Gentlemen, think it through, what did you want him to do? Listen, the day God reveals Himself to you so powerfully, so personally & commissions you to a work specifically... about the dumbest thing any of us could do would be to ignore it, disobey it or simply flat out refuse to be about it...

This is what Paul is saying to Agrippa; & he makes a strong case! It's that, "What would you have done?" kind of argument. The "What else could I have done?" kind of logic. "I wasn't about to be disobedient, I got busy declaring it! Beginning in Damascus, then Jerusalem, ultimately on out to the Gentiles."

& What was the message that he was busy about preaching? In brief, “That they should repent; turn to God, & do works befitting of repentance.” Repent & turn to God. These are 2 sides of the same coin. Because you cannot turn *to* God without turning away *from* your sin. But before you turn away from your sin, you need to have a change of mind *about* your sin. That’s repentance, a change of mind. That’s why the bible speaks in these terms, “**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**”¹ You used to think “this” way about your sin, you saw it as something good, something you tried to fill the void in your heart/life with, thinking it would somehow fulfill you...

Now, you think “this” way, you (through the teaching/preaching/reading of God’s word, the conviction of the Holy Spirit, having caught a glimpse of the love of God & the Holy nature of God) understand that sin is destructive. It binds you, blinds you, grinds you, it destroys you & brings separation between you & God. It’s not good at all, it leads me down the pathway to destruction. Not only will its consequences wreck me currently, but ultimately, eternally.

What’s happened there? I’ve repented, I’ve had a change of mind, I’ve turned from my sin & turned *to* God. I’ve done a 180 in life. I was going away from God thinking I was living the high life. Now I see that deception, that delusion for what it is, I’ve turn around & I’m moving toward God...

So we get the *principle* of repentance, the question is how does it look in the *practical*? How can you really tell if a person has had a “change of mind”? Because they raised their hand or went forward in church? Not necessarily; it can be a good beginning, but it may not mean anything. How can I tell?

It’s true that repentance begins on the inside; however, if it’s genuine (in other words there’s such thing as worldly remorse & also godly repentance, [worldly remorse is nothing more than feelings of guilt, maybe even weeping, but no lasting change)... genuine repentance will manifest itself by not only a change of mind/heart inwardly, but a change in my attitude & my actions outwardly.

& It’s important that we get this because some people get confused. They think that repentance is simply a change in my actions... it’s not. It begins in my mind, permeates down into my heart & makes its way out from there into the practical aspects of my life.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ro 12:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Works won't save you, but saving faith will produce works (does that make sense). It's what J.B. was talking about when he told the Religious leaders, "**bear fruits worthy of repentance,**"² If you *say* you've had a change of heart, but your life never *shows* a change of heart, you've not had a change of heart. You might write it down so you can read it later, Matt 7:15-20. It's by the *fruit* of a person's life that you'll discern the person... do works befitting repentance. Not out of a legal requirement, but a loving relationship w/God...

Vs 21-23

In other words, the reason the Jews seized me & tried to kill me in the temple 2+ yrs ago, wasn't because I was a political revolutionary or somehow terrorizing the Jewish community, but because I was bringing the gospel of light, the truth of the good news of the death/resurrection of J.C. to the Gentiles.

"But having obtained help from God" Paul says, "to this day I stand witnessing to both small & great." ... Can we just pause here for a quick second & think this through. Paul confesses to the fact that the reason he's there is nothing less than God's help or he'd be dead. But here's what's interesting to me. He's in *prison!* & He has been for more than 2 yrs! Here's my point, most of us (if you're anything like me) have a tendency to equate God's help w/creature comforts, physical healing, maybe financial gain... Paul could see God's help w/him having been held unlawfully, unjustifiably in prison for more than 2 yrs!

God help *us* to have such a mindset. Paul would rather have the opportunity to witness & share the gospel of J.C. w/those whom he's standing before right then & there than worry about his personal freedom. He was a kingdom minded man.

"It's God's help that has me before you here today Agrippa." & Here's something else we should take home, "to this day". He received the commission from Christ all those yrs ago. Yet he's still witnessing to both small & great, "to this day". What's my point? Having a great beginning, all the emotional experiences that come w/visions, voices, heavenly encounters is one thing. But it's quite another to carry on faithfully for decades. All the more when the going gets tough, you're a wanted man, people seeking to persecute & perhaps kill you just because you speak of God's grace, the hope of salvation through faith in J.C.

But w/God's help, he continued, witnessing to both small & great. Didn't matter who stood before him.

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 3:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

God's no respecter of persons, He's not willing that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance. He would give them the same message. He didn't reserve the really good stuff for people he wanted to impress, he just gave everyone the same message.

Notice, "*Saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come --*" This was his unswerving commitment to the gospel. Let's remember the apostles weren't preaching from the NT. They were using the O.T. (the prophets & Moses) to point people to Jesus as the Messiah. You see, the gospel isn't based upon experiences or traditions of man, it's based upon the word of God.

& The word of God states in no uncertain terms that the Messiah, God's Shepherd of the sheep would suffer, would be struck, that He would die & be the first fruits of the resurrection (that He would rise from the dead) & that the preaching of this good news that He bore the sins of the world would be proclaimed w/out respect to Jew or Gentile to the whole world! This is why Jesus said to them, "*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*"³

Isaiah plainly wrote that Messiah would suffer for the sake of others. In Isaiah 53 we read, "*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*"⁴

David wrote in the 16th Ps, "*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*"⁵ So we see that He would suffer, He would die, He would rise again (not see corruption/decay) (& there are other Vs but these are sufficient to demonstrate the point). We also see that He would be given as a light to the Gentiles. Isa 49, "*I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.*"⁶

Now; when Paul says that Jesus would be the 1st to rise from the dead, it's a reference to the resurrection. Jesus is the only Person who's received His resurrection body. Others had been raised from the dead, they'd die again.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 5:46-47]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 53:5-6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 16:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 49:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I'd classify that as resuscitation. A *resurrection* on the other hand will rise never to taste death again. (A splitting of hairs perhaps, but it distinguishes the point). Jesus is the 1st fruits of the resurrection.

Vs 24-26

If you've done much witnessing, or perhaps have been around when someone is sharing w/some nonbelievers, you know that when the Holy Spirit starts to zero in on someone, you can almost feel it. It starts getting tense for everyone in the room.

That's what's happening here. Paul is preaching his heart out, the crosshairs are set on Agrippa's heart, but everyone else is feeling the heat. So right in the middle of his testimony Festus blurts out, "Paul, you've lost your mind! All this learning has lifted you out of reality!" No doubt he'd seen Paul pouring over the parchments, always reading & studying... **He can tell Paul is a learned man, an intelligent/articulate fella, but he's like... "Dude, you need to snap back to reality, come on back to planet earth!" Here Paul's talking about visions, voices, prophets... this Man named Jesus who died & rose again from the dead; & that he's happy to be there, unlawfully in prison if it means he gets to preach that message... He's like, "Man, you've lost your mind!"**

But notice Paul doesn't criticize him... Listen, when someone starts getting worked up because you start talking right/wrong, talking about God & what Jesus has done, maintain a position of respect for them. You *do* sound crazy to them. To the Corinthians Paul put it this way, ***"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."***⁷

But notice Paul doesn't lash back out toward him. He simply assures him, "I'm not mad (haven't gone crazy) most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth & reason." I love that. He says, "Hey, check it out, I'm not saying anything that isn't true." The message of the gospel is truth & the invitation of the gospel is reasonable. A man named Jesus really lived, He really performed miracles, died on a cross & showed Himself the Son of God through His resurrection from the dead...

Now; Festus was from Rome, it's plausible this was new information to him. That's why Paul says, "Hey, these things weren't done in a corner, you can verify everything I'm telling you." & He turns his attention right back to Agrippa. Why? Because he was schooled in Jewish scripture, traditions/expectations, he knew about the beginning of the church & all those things...

⁷ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [1 Co 1:18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

That's why he says, "None of these things escapes *his* attention." & Paul can sense the uneasiness of the situation, so before his time is through, look at what he does. He sees his opportunity & he takes his shot...

Vs 27-29

Wow... how powerful is this? Paul presses Agrippa, "Do you believe the prophets? I *know* that you *do* believe."

He puts Agrippa in the hot seat. If he accepts what the prophets have written, he's going to have to follow through & say that Jesus fulfilled them. BTW, let me say this. It may not always be the most comfortable thing to do (to call people to make a decision), but there are times when it's appropriate nonetheless. Don't be too intimidated to call people to that place of opportunity. Sometimes we want to make it complicated when the truth is that it's very simple to cross the bridge of life. "Do you believe?" "Is there a reason you wouldn't place your faith in J.C. right here, right now?"

Paul shared the gospel & asked Agrippa, "Do you believe?" Don't be afraid of offending people, allow them to make a choice. "Festus says I'm crazy, Agrippa. What do you say?" It's direct decision time...

"You almost persuade me to become a Christian..." Now, some translations have this in such a way as to say, "Do you really think you could persuade me in such short time to become a Christian?" More or less mocking Paul. Truth be told there's uncertainty as to exactly how he responded, either way there's tragedy. Because ultimately, he chose *not* to believe.

Listen, some people are like, "Oh, he almost believed!" Listen, if someone is falling off a 100 story building & they *almost* grab the rail... How did it serve them in the end? It didn't. "Almost", is a tragedy. You either trust in Jesus or you don't. You're either saved, or you're not. "Almost" saved is forever lost...

Was he worried about what others would think? I don't know. There's no small amount of people who will be lost forever due to fear of the thoughts of others...

Paul continues to press, "I would to God that every one of you wouldn't just be *almost* as I am, but *altogether* as I am... except for these chains. I wouldn't wish them upon any of you." His heart is for each of them to have an intimate, vibrant relationship w/J.C.

Vs 30-32

Once again, his innocence is proclaimed... Evidently once an appeal was made to Caesar, it couldn't be retracted, so Paul has a one way ticket to Rome.

But that's exactly what Jesus promised him, so once again, God's word will come to pass.

Agrippa saw Paul's trial as a mistake. Paul saw God's hand in it, granting him an opportunity to share the gospel... Perhaps you find yourself in a "trial". Rather than fighting against it, may you (like Paul) see it as an opportunity to share something of *your* faith and of *His* faithfulness in it... Let's take our hearts to the Lord.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for Your faithfulness, & we ask that You strengthen us to give You glory when we pass through the fire, or through the rough waters of this life. To testify of who You are & what You've done on our behalf. God I pray for this body of believers, we pray God for our community leaders, for our national leaders... may there be a great awakening, draw us once again unto Yourself.

Listen, the message of the gospel brings words of truth & reason. Come lets us "reason" together says the Lord. Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white like snow; though they're red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning & the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness... It doesn't get more reasonable than that; believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.