

Acts 26:1-18

## "Paul Shares His Story"

There's nothing that resonates from one heart to another like a personal testimony. When someone is testifying to the fact of something that took place *w/in* them, something that happened *to* them, it has this way of getting a grip on the human heart.

When it comes to speaking *w/other* people about God, there's nothing wrong with being able to quote Ch & Vs. As a matter of fact; I encourage people, employ the word of God as much as you can because the word of God will never return void. It'll always accomplish the purpose for which it's sent forth.

I love that passage in Jeremiah 23 where we read, *"Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, 'And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?'"*<sup>1</sup> God's word can bust up the rocky surface of the hardest heart. So I thoroughly recommend the memorization & implementation of it whenever possible. However; never underestimate the power of your personal story.

When people hear of who you were, of your encounter *w/Christ* & how He changed your life & set you in a new direction it's incredibly impactful. Paul the apostle did this all the time. If anyone could quote scripture it was this man, yet he commonly shared his testimony in his appeal to win people to Jesus.

When we last left off; there he was, standing on the floor of the auditorium. Festus (the new governor) had met *w/king* Agrippa & needed a little help in establishing a formal charge against him. After all, Paul had appealed to Caesar & it wouldn't fare well for Festus if he sent him to Caesar but didn't really have any charge filed. The problem was that after he'd heard all the facts, there really wasn't a law he'd broken, the Jews were just angry because he claimed that Jesus was alive! But having been jerked around & left in prison for over 2 yrs, he finally made the appeal to stand before Caesar rather than allow things to be drug out any farther.

But Agrippa (though radically immoral) was an expert both in his study of scripture & his understanding of Jewish customs. So Festus hoped he could help him figure out something to pin on Paul. Btw let me say this as well. Just knowing what the Bible says doesn't make someone right *w/God*. There are those who think that because they've read the Bible, or have made a study of the Bible that they're good *w/God*.

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<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Je 23:29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But Jesus made it clear when He said, *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."*<sup>2</sup> Just knowing what the Bible says doesn't help me in any way. The fullness & fulfillment of Scripture is found in Christ; it's in *Him* that we find life.

Be that as it may; if you remember right, they made a real event of this hearing. There was pomp, Roman regalia, all the who's who were there, Festus made the motion & Paul (chained between 2 guards) was brought in & all eyes are upon him. He has the floor.

Now; I want to say this. This isn't a trial. He's appealed to Caesar. Paul's main mission here isn't to defend himself, but to declare the gospel. He's been given the opportunity to give the gospel to kings & he's going to give them everything he's got. Before he's finished they'll know who he was, how he met Jesus & what Jesus did in his life. If anyone is on trial here it's Agrippa, it's Festus & all those gathered there. They have a decision to make concerning J.C. The one in chains knows true freedom. Those who are free are enslaved to sin...

### Vs 1-3

Paul is well pleased to share his story with someone who has made a study of Jewish customs, who has made a study of the Mosaic Law & the prophets. Up till this point he's had to share his side of the happenings with pagans who really had no insight or understanding at all into what they were hearing about or listening to. But now he has an audience with someone who can track w/what he's talking about.

So here he stands, before this man whose great granddad had tried to kill Jesus as a baby, whose granddad had J.B. beheaded & whose father had martyred the 1<sup>st</sup> apostle. The Christian community hadn't had a good relationship w/this family at all. But again, Paul isn't on trial, he's simply allowed the opportunity to pour his heart out before kings just as Jesus had said he would do when he was saved (Acts 9:15).

& The fact that this king knows Jewish culture, traditions & religion simply sweetened the pot for Paul. Because he can use that to build a platform that illustrates how *radical* it is that he is now a follower of Christ. So though Paul is pleased to be sharing w/everyone who's there, make no mistake, it's Agrippa that he's set his sights on.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (In 5:39-40). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## Vs 4-5

Though he was born in Tarsus, he moved to Jerusalem evidently at a relatively young age so as to receive his education at the feet of the single most renowned rabbi of his day, Gamaliel.

& He's telling Agrippa that not only was he a good Jew, but of the good Jews he was in the upper echelon of the religion. That's what he means when he tells him that he lived according to the strictest sect as a Pharisee. He's saying that they all know that. & If they were willing to testify they'd tell him that even of the orthodox Jews, he was the most orthodox, he was the most traditional, he was the most zealous, the most religious. He told the Galatians (1:14) that even amongst his contemporaries (other Pharisees), he advanced beyond many of them being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers... If anyone was pushing for perfection according to the law, if anyone was looking to honor & uphold religious tradition... it was Paul! (& He says, they all *know* this, they just won't testify to this).

## Vs 6-8

Boom! He's done circling the runway, it's time to land the plane. He says, "Look, I haven't abandoned what it means to be a faithful Jew, I'm living the fulfillment of it, the outcropping & expected end of it!" (Which ultimately [as we'll see] leads one to faith in Christ).

He says, "Listen, I'm being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers." Is he speaking of the hope of the Messiah, or the hope of the resurrection? Yes. Specifically, it seems to me that he's referencing the hope of the resurrection, but that hope is rooted in the resurrection of J.C. As he said to the Corinthians, "*...if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.*"<sup>3</sup> & In Vs 17, "*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!*"<sup>4</sup>

But it's because of his declaration of the resurrection of J.C. that he is where he is! That's why he says, "It's for this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I'm accused by the Jews." Look, the resurrection is a clearly proclaimed promise of the O.T. Daniel Ch 12 & Vs 2, "*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.*"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 15:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 15:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Da 12:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Ch of the book of Job, he said that even after his body is destroyed (after he dies) that he would, in his flesh, see God. In other words, this life is not the end. We will be raised bodily to be w/God forever. Now, to be absent from the body is to be present w/the Lord. Soul sleep isn't found in scripture. But the day will come (the resurrection) when we'll be reunited w/our bodies. But don't worry, they'll be fit for heaven, a few upgrades will be included 😊.

But let's not forget that when they came to that tomb early Sunday morning, the body of Jesus was gone. He'd been raised bodily from the dead, so too w/you & so too w/me... So the question is; why should Paul be in jail because he too believed in the resurrection?

& Though he's speaking to Agrippa, the word "you" in Vs 8 is plural. He broadens his scope to ask everyone present, "Why should be thought incredible by you (by any of you) that God raises the dead?" Think about that... That's a great question, isn't it?

"Agrippa, you've read the scriptures. In the beginning God created the heavens & the earth. He spoke & light was; he breathed into man & he came alive, he split the sea, caused manna to miraculously appear every morning. The scriptures are replete w/miracles. Why therefore should it be thought incredible that God should raise the dead?"

If we can get past the 1<sup>st</sup> Vs in the bible, everything else is downhill! The logic is sound. "If we believe God can do anything, then when I say He raised Jesus from the dead, why is that offensive or outlandish to you?"

You see; how big is Your God? The difficulty of a task can really only be measured against the agent attempting to accomplish it. In the book of Jeremiah God asks the rhetorical question, "*Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?*"<sup>6</sup> The angel told Mary, "*For with God nothing will be impossible.*"<sup>7</sup> Well, if we really believe that, then the proclamation of the resurrection of J.C. from the dead shouldn't be silenced, it should be celebrated!

## Vs 9-11

"I get it," Paul says. "I've been where they are! & Beyond!" He uses the words, "exceedingly enraged against them". He was a madman, he had one goal & that was to extinguish Christianity & the name of Jesus of Nazareth from the earth!

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Je 32:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Lk 1:37). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He punished believers, put them in prison, voted in favor the death penalty & compelled them to blaspheme. "Renounce Jesus or die!" Now; having this great rage shows that even though he was very religious, his relationship w/God wasn't right.

But this was something Paul came later to deeply regret. Possibly more so than having Christians killed was the thought of forcing them to blaspheme. That weighed on him. Did they return to Christ like Peter, did they walk away never to return?

But this is who he was; a murderous madman on a mission to rid the world of any follower of J.C. He's telling this to Agrippa... Let me say this; don't be afraid to tell people where you've come from. But I would also say this; tell me your story if it's for *Christ's* glory. But if it's for your own... leave it alone. Many people seem to glorify their sin rather than their Savior.

But Paul was driving home a point. Jesus can save the worst (as exemplified in himself). There's no sin too great, no sinner too foul, no person too far away but that the blood of J.C. can't redeem them, forgive them & make them new. If God could save Paul, than He can save you.

### Vs 12-15

Again this shows the vehemence w/which Paul (his Jewish name/Saul, Roman name/Paul) pursued his mission. During the midday, most people were doing the siesta thing. You didn't travel in the heat of the day, Paul was a "no days off" kind of guy when it came to his passion for persecution!

There he was; midday on his way to Damascus. "Bam!" This flash of light, brighter than the sun, shines around him "arrests him" & he and his companions all fall to the ground. (How dramatic is this?)

He hears a voice, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It's hard for you to kick against the goads." God had been pulling & prodding him toward Jesus, but he'd been resisting, but his resistance was futile. God wanted his attention & He was going to get it.

But we note that Jesus knew him by name, "Saul, Saul". This was a personal appeal. When Jesus calls you, He calls you by name. He knows who you are. & As always, we note that Jesus so intimately identifies w/His own that what you do to one of His, you do to Him. "Why are you persecuting Me?" "Persecuting You? Who are You?"

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Wait, what!? These words transformed Paul's world in an instant...

In a single moment in time he realized that Jesus was alive, not dead. He understood that Jesus truly reigned in glory, He wasn't damned in shame. He realized that to persecute the followers of Jesus was to persecute Jesus & that in persecuting Jesus he fought against the God of his fathers. Instantly, Paul repented; his mind was changed, his heart was changed, & his life was changed.

### Vs 16-18

Wow... I love what the Lord tells him in Vs 16. "Rise & stand on your feet; for *I have appeared to you for this purpose...*" Listen, God has a plan for your life, there is a purpose behind your redemption. It's not simply so that you can go to heaven (as glorious as that is). God wants you & me to be ministers (that is servants). We're not to use the message to serve us, we serve the message, we deliver the message, the message of the gospel... We're also to be witnesses of what we've seen & of the things we learn as we grow & spend time w/the Lord, learning *from* the Lord.

As believers we don't need to conjure some emotional hype or experience, we just need to be faithful to share the experience that we've had w/Jesus. "I was lost, now I'm found. I was blind, now I see & the Man who brought me home, who opened my eyes was Jesus."

It's interesting that Jesus told Paul that he would be used to open people's eyes even as he himself was at that moment, blind.

But this is the transforming power of the gospel. Remember these words? "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,*"<sup>8</sup>

There is a transformation that takes place at the point of salvation. Our eyes are opened. Sin blinds mankind. Not physically, but spiritually. It blinds us to its consequences, to how destructive it is, to the bondage it brings. It blinds us to the nature of who Jesus truly is, tells you that God is holding out on you, doesn't want you to enjoy life. But Satan is the one who came to steal, kill & destroy, Jesus came to give you life, & that more abundantly. So Paul was to open people's eyes.

& Turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God... Guys, this is the description of humanity apart from Christ. In bondage to Satan, in darkness, broken, fragmented. People are all, "What's wrong w/the world today?"

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 1:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

At its root it's a spiritual issue. Healing & hope is found in J.C. But if you're blind, if you're in the dark, you can't see that, you're lost, w/out hope being w/out God in the world. Satan likes to twist & distort the way man thinks... & the fruit of it is all around us.

God help us to be about the work of opening eyes to the truth of J.C., turning people from darkness to light that they might receive the forgiveness of sins & an inheritance among those who are sanctified (that is set apart from sin & from self) (not by works or religious achievements) by faith in Jesus (their connection of love & trust in Jesus).

Listen; the last thing I wanna do is use this platform for any purpose other than its intended purpose, & that is to give out the word of God; the gospel of J.C. But one thing we've noted as of late about social media is that if people have a passion for something; they'll preach it openly & unashamed. This is our calling; to be unashamed of the gospel. I'm not saying a healthy debate is wrong, but let's keep our endgame in focus, to draw men to Jesus. Paul told Timothy, *"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."*<sup>9</sup>

This world is in darkness, people are slipping off the planet apart from Christ. Where does your passion, your calling lie? Let's pray & ask God to use our lives to open the eyes of many, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins & an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus...

#### Prayer Points:

God that's our prayer. That You would give us Your heart for this lost & dying world. That we not be driven off course, or distracted from what You've called us to do. & We pray for our leaders, both locally & nationally, that they be given wisdom in these trying times. God; You've called us to a time such as this, may we rise up by the power of Your Spirit & run this race to win for the glory of Your name. Use us oh God, to impact change, to make an eternal difference in the lives of others both near & far; & we'll give You praise.

& If God is speaking to you, even now you can believe on the Lord J.C. & be transferred & transformed. From darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, receiving forgiveness of sins & everlasting life through faith in J.C.

<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Ti 2:24-26]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.