

## Scripture Reading:

Acts 26:1 "Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: 2 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, 3 especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. 4 My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 5 They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. 7 To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. 8 Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? 9 Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. 12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'" 19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. 21 For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come-- 23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

# "Paul Tells of His Conversion "

Paul has been given an opportunity to speak to the gathered magistrates and he does so with a very clear purpose: One that he would later give to young Timothy as a command and priority for all of us: "I Timothy 2: " Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

- Paul is here to preach the Gospel and to call these men and women to repentance, for their own sake and the sake of those who they rule over!

Last week we saw Paul's confession of his sins of pride and legalism as a Pharisee, this week we will see him give an account of his conversion, his testimony if you will and next week we will see the impact and power of what he shared.

**This is the third account of Paul's conversion given by Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and I have provided a side-by-side comparison in the order of worship and want to say just a word about them before looking at the details of what is given here in the final account. This touches on the truth & authority of God's Word – A vital issue for our covenant youth & all of us!**

**The first is the historical account given by Luke in chapter nine, the second is Paul's testimony before the hostile Jewish crowd in Jerusalem and the final one today is before King Agrippa. Much is made of the differences in these accounts by liberal scholars and worldly skeptics who do NOT believe the Bible is inspired truth, communicated to us from God.**

- **Thus they claim these accounts are full of contradictions and do not accurately reflect what happened.**

**I have provided this comparison so you can read through them as families and discuss why such attacks are made, remembering that our attitude affects what we see. For example, if I am a skeptic looking for contradictions and I see Luke say that the other men stood speechless in chapter nine and Paul say they fell down in today's text, well there you have it: A flat out-contradiction! And I don't stop there, because Luke's first account says everyone heard the voice from heaven, but to the Jews Paul says they "did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me" and in the final account he says the voice spoke only to him. Contradiction they cry!**

**On the other hand if I believe the Bible is the Word of God, then I assert that it is true and does not contradict itself. I do this NOT with blind faith, but rather by honestly asking how we should reconcile these three accounts of a real historical event: One given by the historian Luke in an orderly manner with most of the details, the second given by an eye-witness of the event to a hostile Jewish audience where he focuses on the faithful Jew Ananias and a second account from Paul which focuses on the authority of Jesus for King Agrippa.**

**Here is how I would reconcile them: For someone asking an honest question: Paul and his companion are on the road and a great light appears that stuns them all and throws them down to the ground. Jesus, in a voice that thunders from heaven, speaks only to Paul who rises when Jesus tells him to. The others stand up because they can hear a voice but do not understand what is being said. How do I know that is very close to what happened? Because that is what you get if you put all of the accounts together assuming they are all truthful!**

- **We know this is important because, IF the Bible is wrong on such historical facts then WHY should we believe what it tells us about spiritual realities like our salvation?**

**IF these accounts are not telling us truth when it comes to the details we can see, then why should we trust what the Bible says regarding how the Apostle Paul's sins can be forgiven?**

- **I hope this comparison and my example lead to many other good discussions in the coming week!**

**As we do, we must remember that the writer of Hebrews tells us in the great chapter about faith, "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."**

- **Those who come questioning the existence of God or the authority of His Word will certainly find lots of problems in the Bible and get no answers or rewards.**
- **Those who come in faith, do not have to leave their minds at home, but can expect God to not only reward them, but to show them the way of truth!**

**So with that in mind, let us consider the text before us this morning:**

**In verse 12 Paul begins with "While thus occupied..." referring to his rabid persecution of the Church.**

**Paul's desire was to crush this new movement, but Jesus had other plans!**

So at mid-day on his way to Damascus, Paul says “I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.” *[discuss the greater light example]*

- It is no wonder they all fell to the ground when you ponder a light greater than the sun!

Then Paul says, “I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Remember that Paul’s direct appeal is to King Agrippa and thus to have Jesus speaking Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament is important to him. I will comment on the concept of kicking against the goads in a moment when we talk more about testimonies.

Paul knows he is in the presence of God and thus he asks, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.’”

- Paul here gives more detail on the commission he received from Jesus because it is relevant for King Agrippa and all those Gentile rulers who have gathered in this auditorium.

17 “I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’”

- The commission from Jesus was powerful and very pointed!
- The picture is of a blind man or woman stumbling around in the dark under the power of Satan.

This is now true of BOTH the Jews and the Gentiles because rather than share the light of salvation with the Gentiles, the Jews had rejected that light for even themselves.

- And yes, such was Paul’s state as he traveled that day to Damascus...

Paul had been blinded by his pride and legalism and now stumbled about trying to crush God’s people working under the power of Satan.

- On this road, he met the light that came into the world, Jesus, and would now be given clear direction and the power to overcome sin and death with the Gospel!

Paul was a changed man and as we will see more clearly next week, he wanted the same for all those present... 19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. 21 For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come-- 23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, & would proclaim light to the Jewish people & to the Gentiles."

- Paul’s appeal is simple: Come to the light and be saved!
- Or as the Psalmist challenges the civil magistrates, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you perish!”

Next week we will look at the various reactions to this message, but for today I want us to consider the power and importance of our testimonies.

- This is the second time that we see the Apostle Paul use the account of his conversion to witness!

What I want us to remember this morning is that each of us have a testimony and that using it as part of our witnessing is very important. If you are thinking to yourself ‘well I don’t have much of a testimony’ or even wonder if you do have one...

- Please listen carefully.
- There are basically three types of testimonies found in the Scriptures.

First we have men like Peter or Paul who were converted through first hand encounters with Jesus.

- NO ONE today can claim such a testimony, so if we think ‘I don’t have a testimony just like Paul’s, that is a very true statement.

However, the second type of testimony that we see in the Scripture comes from those who are converted from a life of sin by those who testify or witness to them about the reality of Jesus & His work.

Examples of this would be the Philippian jailer or the other Jews and Gentiles that the Apostles and others preached to down through the ages. The witness of these witnesses did not cease with their deaths, just as we can know that Luther led the reformation in Germany even though all those who verified that he lived and what he did are now dead themselves.

John speaks of this near the end of his Gospel, “ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” *John 20:30*

- The final type of testimony that we find in the Scriptures is where you have a faithful Saint raised in the covenant community.

Examples this would be young Timothy who knew the Scriptures from a very young age, or Saints like Mary or Simeon who seem to have been faithful all the days of their lives.

Many of the older members here at Church of the King, including myself, were converted later in life... We have a testimony of conversion to share!

- *Discuss how the recounting of our testimony might vary...*
- *Share my testimony...*
- *Talk about the goading of the watch & what may have goaded Paul...*

So if I am an example of a man converted later in life, do we have examples of faithful Saints who can give a testimony? As we look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> generations of families in our Church we can see those who have never known a day where they did not acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior!

- They have NO ‘conversion’ testimony, but rather they can testify about God’s faithfulness!
- We need to ask ourselves in this age of testimonies, which of these types of testimonies should get more attention?

If a biker who broke all Ten Commandments on a regular basis was converted in his own Damascus road experience today we would be rightly excited, give God all the glory and should not fear to have such a man use the account of that conversion as part of his testimony, as even I have done this morning.

- However, we should give God no less glory, be no less excited and even expect God to use the testimony of what happened here today in more powerful ways!

Today we baptized little James Maximus and gave him a new name. His faithful parents, knowing they had no power to save their child who was born as a member of Adam’s race, dead in his trespasses and sin, brought him to the Church and confessed their dependence on Jesus!

- **By baptizing James in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we have claimed God's promise that His gracious salvation is unto us and to our children!**

**We have joined with those parents in vowing to raise James in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Lord willing Isaiah and Valerie will be faithful in teaching James about His new name and his new life. When James is tempted by the flesh they will use the rod and the Word to direct him in the paths of the new life he has in Jesus. As he grows, James will learn the joy of gathering each week with God's people to be ministered to by God' Word and Sacrament.**

- **Lord willing, from this pulpit James will learn to hear and to obey Jesus.**
- **Lord willing, from this Table James will learn to know and to love Jesus!**

**So I ask again, which testimony should get the most attention? If you ask anyone who is converted late in life, they will tell you of the sorrow they have pondering the 'lost years.'**

- **The time in their lives where they did not serve Jesus!**

**Yes, our right theology of salvation teaches us that they were indeed saved from the foundation of the world as were we all. BUT, all those lost years are among the wood, hay and stubble that will be burned away when God evaluates the quality of our Christian walk.**

**James and the other covenant children who have walked with Jesus from their earliest memories have the opportunity, if they are faithful, to love and obey Jesus all the days of their lives, amassing much gold & silver & precious stones: Treasures that Jesus will refine and make more glorious when their Christian life is evaluated.**

- **Thus they most certainly should have the more glorious testimony!**

**The Hebrews Hall of Faith in chapter 11 is full of such people and the writer then calls all of us to think about all those who have gone before as we consider how we should serve Jesus in the coming week:**

**Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."**

#### **Communion Meditation:**

**I Corinthians 15:1 "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."**