
Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R2L: With a Personal Testimony of Faith in Christ (Part 1)

Acts 26:1-32

1 Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Let me begin by asking you some questions; simple questions to which if you believe the answer is true, that you would say, “Yes.” Do you believe yourself to be a Christian? Are you generally overjoyed and/or overwhelmed by the thought of being a Christian? Do you believe that becoming a Christian is the single most important thing that has EVER happened in your life? Do you believe that it would be a benefit to others to know Christ as you do? Since becoming a Christian, have you talked to many non-Christians about his or her need to know Jesus as Savior and Lord? Have you talked to a non-Christian specifically about the gospel of Christ in the past month? How about in this past week?

It is interesting that as much as we Christians say we know, love and believe in Christ, our talking about Him can often be greatly limited. Why is this? Ron Hutchcraft wrote a book entitled, *Wake Up Calls* and in it he gives four key reasons why Christians do not share Christ regularly:

1. 90% have failed in witnessing attempts in the past
2. Many Christians are biblically illiterate
3. Many Christians believe that sharing Christ is to be left for the “professionals”
4. Many Christians believe we ought not to impose our faith on others

When we are reminded of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, few of us would deny that this is good news; that it is in fact the *best news*. In the message of the gospel, we see God reconciling sinners to Himself and offering the gift of eternal life to all who will receive His Son, Jesus Christ, as their Savior and Lord. We know this is supposed to be good news. We know how it has changed our lives. But, beloved, if we truly believe it is good news, we will do something with it; we will be compelled to share it with others.

This morning it is my desire to encourage and edify you in the biblical task of witnessing. I hope to give you a simple tool that will enable you to engage lost people with the person and work of Jesus. Each one of you already possesses this tool, the problem is that many of us just do not know how to use this tool very well. What is the tool of which I speak? It is your personal testimony of faith in Christ.

Let me remind you that your personal testimony is simply the story of all that God has graciously done to bring you to believe, love and follow His Son, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The beauty of a testimony is that EVERY believer has one and that God uses them to point others to Jesus. This is exactly what we find here in Acts 26. Back in Acts 22, we saw Paul giving his personal testimony to a whole crowd while standing on the steps of the

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Jewish temple. This morning the setting is different. Recall that here in Acts 26 Paul is on trial before Governor Festus, King Agrippa and his wife Bernice, along with a host of other Roman dignitaries. Rather than being intimidated by this audience, Paul set out to make the most of the opportunity. And rather than giving some great theological treatise, what did Paul do here? Paul shared his own personal testimony.

Why does Paul start with his own testimony? Beloved, the truth about one’s personal testimony is that no one can tell you it’s wrong. Those you share it with cannot say it did not happen to you because what you are sharing happened *to you*. And why is it important to share what happened to you in coming to Jesus? By sharing what happened to you, you showing others what both could and needs to happen to them.

You might remember back in Acts 22 as we examined Paul’s testimony, we learned that a meaningful testimony is conversational in style rather than preachy. A good testimony seeks common ground between the giver and the hearers. And a good testimony always seeks to point people to Christ, leaving a door open for more. Also, a good testimony is brief. If you read Paul’s testimony in Acts 22, it takes just under 3 minutes. If you read Paul’s testimony before King Agrippa in our text, it takes just around 3 minutes. In other words, believers should be able to introduce others to the gospel of Christ by sharing their own personal testimony in around 3 minutes. If you get more time afterwards, great; but you and I need to share the essence of our first coming to faith in Christ in around 3 minutes.

The blessing of our text this morning is that it shows us the basic elements that ought to be included in everyone’s personal testimony. If we can remember these components; we will do well in sharing Christ. To be sure, the circumstances will be different, but there will be these essential common characteristics in every personal testimony. This morning we will look at the first two of three things we need to do to have an effective personal testimony.

I. We draw attention to ourselves (26:1-8)

I know. It sounds wrong, a Christian draw attention to himself? But if we are to reveal the greatness of Christ, it all begins with showing others the reality of our own need. We are not, in any way, to glory in ourselves, but rather to tell the story of our lives in a way that purposely brings glory to God. To do this, we must start at the beginning. We need to tell others what our lives were like before coming to Christ. Now, let us note how this was exactly what Paul did in our text. In verse 1 we have the setting under which Paul gives his testimony. We read, ***Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense:***

If you were counting, this would be the fourth time since Acts 21 that Paul has spoken for himself. Just two years before this moment, Paul had been arrested and falsely accused in the temple. This set up his **first** defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin. His **second** defense was after he had been transported to Caesarea where he appeared before the Roman governor, Felix. Felix, in order to keep some peace with the Jews, kept Paul in prison without grounds for two years. After Felix was replaced by Governor Festus, Paul stood a **third** time to give his defense. Because Paul was not getting any justice from Festus, he appealed his case to Caesar. But because Festus did not know what to write in the report he would send along with Paul to Caesar, he asked Agrippa to interview Paul. This is our text, Paul’s **fourth** defense before King Agrippa.

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We pick up the account then in verses 2-3 reading, **2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.**

One of the things that stand out here is Paul's courtesy and respect. There is no doubt that Paul was bold and courageous, fearing no man; but even as 1 Peter 3:15 reminds us, our giving an account for the hope that we have is to be done with gentleness and reverence. Paul comes across as gracious and personable. Paul counts himself "fortunate" to relate his experience to Agrippa not because the king was so good, for we know he was morally corrupt; yet in contrast to Festus, a Roman, at least Agrippa was Jewish and familiar with Jewish thinking and theology. And it was because of Jewish theology; not anything illegal according to Rome, that Paul was on trial.

And there is a valuable lesson for us in this. Beloved, when you give your personal testimony, you need to know your audience. You need to use words and ideas that your hearers will understand. You need to share things from your life that others can relate to in order to gain their attention. But what sort of things are we talking about? I am glad you asked. We can see two things in our text to incorporate into our testimonies. First, we are to draw attention to ourselves by...

A. Sharing about our past condition (26:4-5)

4 So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

Remember, this is just a three minute overview of your life and so you cannot expect to share everything from your past. You need to be purposely selective. You need to consider an aspect of your life before Christ that will create both an interest as well as provide a launching pad to the gospel. And what did Paul share here? He shared his own upbringing, which would be something that the Jews in the audience, particularly Agrippa, would find interesting. Also, remember that Paul was accused of being anti-Jewish by the Jews. And so Paul begins by pointing out two facts. First, that he was born into a Jewish home in Tarsus, but later moved to Jerusalem for rabbinic training. And second, after his training, he lived a zealous life as a Pharisee; the most conservative and literal of the rabbis. By calling himself a Pharisee, he spoke volumes to Agrippa. Agrippa knew the Pharisees did not play around with religion. They were seriously devoted to the Scriptures and to Yahweh. Paul declared himself not just to be a Jew, but a fundamentalist Jew.

Now, there seems to be something implied by Paul's next statement and that is a question that Agrippa would want answered. What is that question? Agrippa no doubt was wondering, "Paul, if it is true that you were raised a Pharisee, then why do the Jews hate you?" Again, Paul anticipates this question and answers it in verses 6-8 where we read next, **6 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?**

I would like you to see how seamlessly Paul moved from his past to his present. In verse 5 Paul said that he had "lived as a Pharisee" but now he says, "***I am standing on trial for the hope...***" This brings us to the second aspect of drawing attention to ourselves, we begin with

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information about our past, but must not stay there. Next, we are to draw attention to ourselves by...

B. Sharing about our present condition (6-8)

Notice in verses 6-8 that Paul is not focus on what he once was, but what he is and has now. What does Paul tell us different? There are two things that are different for Paul that are to be true of every believer.

First, Paul says he now has “hope”. Notice that three times Paul uses the word “hope” with Agrippa. In verse 6 it is, ***the hope of the promise made by God***, in verse 7 it is, ***the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain***; as well as, ***for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews***.

When Paul’s critics rallied against him, they sought to paint him as a radical, negative man. They sought to present Paul as *against* them. Yet Paul turns all this around, revealing himself not to be anti-Jewish but actually pro-Hope. Paul is for *Hope*. Paul was *for* what the twelve tribes of Israel had been awaiting for centuries. So rather than being some renegade, Paul shows himself to be a complete Jew. I have hope for which Israel longs. But where did this hope come from? This leads us to the second part of our present condition; not only do believers have hope, but...

Second, this hope is founded in the promise (or Word) of God. Again, in verse 6 we read, ***And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers...*** Beloved, we too often give a gospel presentation of our opinions and ideas. A true gospel presentation; a true presentation of hope must be based in something sure and unchanging. We cannot manufacture hope. True hope is something that must be *received*. Paul says that his hope is based on the promise God made to the fathers. In other words, what God had promised the Jews He had now fulfilled in Jesus. Now, some of you may be wondering, “Just what is hope? What is this hope to which Paul speaks?” Paul gives us a clue as to what this Christian hope is at the end of verse 8, something we will explore more fully in a moment. But what is the hope? Paul says in verse 8, ***Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?*** What is Paul’s hope? What is the Christian’s hope? The same hope that they Jews have had ever since Abraham; the hope and fact of the resurrection.

And here is another lesson for us. As Christians in this ever increasingly immoral and anti-Biblical age, it is easy for us to become better known for what we are *against* rather than what we are *for* or even for what we *have*. Are we against homosexuality? Or would it not be better to say we are for God’s intended and clearly stated purpose for sexuality? Are we against same-sex marriage? Is it not better to say we are for God’s own stated purpose and practice of marriage between one man and one woman? What are we for and what do we have as believers? We have the *hope* that God promised in His Word! We have something the world lacks and desperately longs for. We have the hope of Jesus Christ! This is what we need to share with others.

So then, the purpose of the first part of your personal testimony is to create an interest. We are to momentarily draw attention to ourselves so that those who hear us will identify with us and begin to wonder what it is you have that they seem to lack. Once there, we must draw attention the second consideration, the means by which we find ourselves in this hopeful, present condition...

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II. We must draw attention to Jesus (9-23)

As soon as we mention Jesus, people expect us to get preachy and to start pointing our fingers at them. I would suggest that when you begin to share the person of Jesus, you continue to use the first person pronouns. In other words, rather than saying, “You...this and that...” We are to be communicating what the Lord did in “my” life. We are drawing attention to what Jesus did in our own personal lives. We see Paul doing this in two ways in verses 9-23. Like him, we need to first be...

A. Sharing what the Lord did to convince you (9-18).

One testimony killer is giving the impression that somehow *you* changed your life. In the gospel, it is the Lord who changes lives. The purpose of a personal testimony is to tell others how Jesus did it; how Jesus convinced you of your need to change. For Paul, this came about in two ways.

First, in verses 9-11, Paul shared what he used to think about Jesus. There we read, **9 So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.**

Here Paul is looking back some 25 years. It was likely that some still living in Caesarea and perhaps even some in this courtroom with Paul could testify to this truth. Paul used to despise the name of Jesus. There were some who could say that they had heard him say such things. Paul used to do everything he could to eliminate the name of Jesus from society. There were those there that had seen that. Paul had used to hunt Christians down as though they were wild and dangerous animals that needed to be disposed of. Again, there were those who would agree that these statements were true of Paul's past.

Sometimes we find our pre-Christian past so shameful, all we want to do is ignore it. We refuse to acknowledge it and avoid talking about it. But how does your testimony for Christ benefit if you refuse to speak of the sin that revealed your very need of Christ. What did Paul do here? Paul spoke of his pre-Christian sin. He never sugar-coated his past. Nor did he ever glamorize it. Both extremes are wrong. Beloved, we must deal with our past sin God's way. And God's way includes using that past as a spotlight that will help others see their need of Jesus. But just how to we deal with sin God's way? This leads to the second way in which Jesus convinced Paul of his need to change.

Second, Paul drew attention to the day of his conversion in verses 12-18. Let us read the first part of this testimony in verses 12-14 where we read, **12 While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'**

Let me ask you, do you remember what happened when God saved you? Can you recall the circumstances that brought you to that place of crying out for salvation? Beloved, I was in awe and trembling as I stood before God and a company of witnesses pledging my love and devotion to Laura. I was rightly joyous and overwhelmed when I first held my two children in my arms. But there has been, and never will be a more glorious time in my life than when the Lord Jesus Christ drew me

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to himself. Do you remember that day? Notice that Paul gives some important details about his own conversion, answering the questions of *where*— on a road outside of Damascus; of *when*— it was at midday; and of *how*— the Lord broke into his life even though he was not even searching for Him. Yet the testimony of Paul was that Jesus sought him; dropping him to his knees, calling him by name (“Saul”), repeatedly, and then confronting him with his own sin by way of a question, asking, “Why are you persecuting Me?” It all ended with a word picture that summed up the futility of Paul’s life when Jesus said to him, **“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”** Okay now, what on earth does this mean, to kick against the goads?

This was an old saying, a Greek proverb, which was also familiar to the Jews and anyone who made a living in agriculture. An ox goad was a stick with a pointed piece of iron on its tip used to prod the oxen when plowing. The farmer would prick the animal to steer it in the right direction. Sometimes the animal would rebel by kicking out at the goad, and this would result in it being driven even further into its flesh. In essence, the more an ox rebelled, the more it suffered. Thus, Jesus’ words to Saul on the road to Damascus: **“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”**

Paul is looking back at his conversion here while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians. You recall he had a blinding encounter with Jesus. The conversion of Saul was the turning point in his life. It was at this moment that Jesus took control of Paul and let him know his rebellion against God was a losing battle. Paul’s actions were as senseless as an ox kicking **“against the goads.”** Paul had passion and sincerity in his fight against Christianity, but he was not heading in the direction God wanted him to go. Jesus was going to goad (“direct” or “steer”) Paul in the right direction. This is where we get the phrase, “Goading someone into doing something...”

Now, there is a powerful lesson in this ancient Greek proverb. We, too, find it hard to kick against the goads. In Proverbs 15:10, Solomon wrote, **“Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way...”** When we choose to disobey God, we become like the rebellious ox—driving the goad deeper and deeper into our souls. In Proverbs 13:15 we read, **“But the way of the treacherous [or unfaithful – the one who goes his own way] is hard.”** How much better it is for us to heed God’s voice, to listen to the pangs of conscience! By resisting God’s authority we are only punishing ourselves. By kicking at the goads, the young ox had to learn submission the hard way. And so it had been for Paul.

Having been now confronted with this bright, midday revelation, Paul then determines to ask a question. There in verse 15 we read, **“And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”** I am not sure what kind of answer Paul was expecting, but he must have been shocked to hear, **“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”** What went through Paul’s mind at this point? We do not know. Did he wonder if the voice he was hearing was actually Jesus’? If it was, it meant that Jesus was alive and that he had been WRONG all these years. It would mean that everything he had done to the Christians was horrifically sinful. I wonder if he thought, “Okay, this is it, Jesus is going to kill me on the spot!”

But then Paul got another shock. We see this in verse 16 where we read what Jesus said next to Paul, **“But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;”** What did Paul hear? Probably something along the lines of, “I am not going to kill you, rather I am giving you a new purpose. From now on, you are working for Me!” No doubt Paul was flabbergasted. How could Jesus use him? What about all the horrible things I have done. Beloved, Jesus could use Paul for the very same reason He can use you and me. It is

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something called “grace” – the unmerited favor of God that enables a person to no longer live for himself but for Jesus.

Let us hear another bit of Paul’s personal testimony, something he wrote about five years after this appearance before Agrippa; a letter to Timothy, a young pastor. In 1 Timothy 1:12-14 we read,

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; 14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

Beloved, God can save anyone, no matter what they have done with their lives! And let me tell you something; when God saves a person, He takes control. Let me say that again, when God saves a person, He takes control. We see this very thing back in Acts 26:17-18 where Jesus says to Paul, ***17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.***

We learn something remarkable in Paul’s testimony about the forgiveness of God. We learn that forgiveness is *necessary* because of sin, that forgiveness is *available* because of Jesus, and that forgiveness is *experienced* simply and only through faith in Him. Paul was convinced of these things. And so, as you give your testimony, do as Paul did here; explain what the Lord did to convince you. But that is not all; there is one more step. Not only must you share what the Lord did to convince you, you must also...

B. Share how the Lord changed you (19-23)

In verses 19-23 note how Paul communicates three things that the Lord did to change him. I would exhort you to include these into your own testimony if they are true.

The **first** change is this, that upon receiving Jesus, you have **a new Master**. Look at verse 19 where we read, ***So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision...*** Beloved, the Lord does not enter our lives simply to come along for the ride. Jesus is the one who gives the directions. Are you obeying Jesus? If you are disobeying Jesus, you are not His disciple. And, if you are not His disciple, you are not saved. Are you obeying Jesus? Yes or no. If not, confess it, repent and ask Jesus to forgive you.

The **second** change is this, that upon coming to Jesus, you are given **a new mission**. We see this in verses 20-21 where we read, ***20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. 21 For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.***

I would have you notice that Paul did not hesitate in obeying the command of Jesus. Where did Paul start obeying? He started right in Damascus where he was saved. If you recall the life of Paul in the book of Acts, you will see that from this very point on, Paul consistently lived to fulfill this new, God-given mission. What was that mission? We see it at the end of verse 20; to call people everywhere to repent (that is to turn from sin), to turn to God (to

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follow His ways), and to demonstrate the reality of repentance by performing (constantly doing) deeds appropriate, consistent with repentance.

On a side, I find it interesting that Paul, who so firmly and rightly opposed salvation by works; works either before or after conversion, nonetheless demanded good works as the only evidence of salvation.

The **third** and final change Paul includes in his testimony after noting his new Master and his new mission is this; that upon coming to Jesus you have **a new message**. Look with me a verses 22-23 where we read, **22 So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.**

Remember that as a Pharisee, Paul had believed and taught a totally different message. He believed not in salvation by grace, but salvation by works. It was this message that drove his antagonism toward Christ, the Church and Christianity. By the way, this is the same general message believed by most “religious” people today. Ask the average person what they must do to be saved and they will tell you that so long as they do the right things; more good than bad; they will make it to heaven. The base this on the notion that God accepts good people. This is a sincere belief held by many, even many who attend church; but it does not matter how sincere you are if you are sincerely wrong. If you hold to the wrong message, you will die in your sins.

Beloved, the message matters; and it matters most especially when we present the gospel. And the tool that will allow you the greatest opportunity to share the gospel is your personal testimony. So, when preparing and sharing your testimony, you need to make sure you are getting it right. And what is the message? That Christ suffered and died in the place of sinners; that He rose from the dead on the third day never to die again, and that all who are convinced of this, believing in Him, will also be changed by Him; made a child of God and a recipient of the hope of eternal life.

So then, this morning we have seen that in preparing our personal testimony, we need to draw attention to ourselves, what our lives were like before Christ that revealed our need of Christ and then we are to draw attention to Christ Himself, sharing how He convinced us of our need and how He has changed us.

Next week we will look at the responses we can expect as we share our personal testimonies. But for now, I trust you all have been convinced of your need for Jesus. And then, even more pressing, how do you answer the question, “How has the Lord changed you?” And the follow up question, “How is the Lord changing you?” For those whom God saves, He continues to change right up until the day we stand face to face before Jesus. As Paul said to the Philippians, ***For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).***

Soli Deo Gloria

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