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## 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.**

A.W. Tozer, an author you would do well to become familiar with, made an interesting comment about what he termed, “The New Cross.” By this, he refers to all the new and novel ideas people and churches have assigned the cross; just about everything except for what it truly represents; a great Savior dying for the transgressions of great sinners. In 1966, nearly 50 years ago, Tozer wrote:

*ALL UNANNOUNCED AND MOSTLY UNDETECTED there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental...The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, “Come and assert yourself for Christ.” To the egotist it says, “Come and do your boasting in the Lord.” To the thrill seeker it says, “Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship.” The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.<sup>1</sup>*

Tozer's point was that a false Cross and a false conception of the message of the Cross, which is in fact the gospel, has been making inroads into the church. The cross is a symbol of death. It pictures the abrupt and violent end of a human being. In the days where crucifixion was practiced, the man who took up his cross knew he had started down a road where he had already said good-bye to his family and friends. He knew he was not coming back and that the purpose of taking up the cross was the very end of himself. The cross never made a compromise; never modified anything, spared absolutely nothing; affected every part of the man, completely and decisively. The cross did not seek to be on good terms with its victim. The cross was cruel and hard, and upon finishing its work, the man who was - was no more. That is the message of the Cross.

But in addition to this, the fact that there is being taught this “New Cross” reminds of an important truth; one that we have been looking at extensively in the life of Paul as he stands in trial after trial simply for teaching people about Jesus. The truth is this; “that what we believe will determine what we do.” To say this another way, one's theology (what he believes about God and God's Word) will drive one's methodology (what that person does). And one further truth is this, “Christ-centered theology always results in Christ-focused evangelism.” The more your life, your mind, and your heart are centered on Christ, the more you will speak of Christ to others. *To speak little of Christ to others is to have little love for Christ.*

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<sup>1</sup> Tozer, A.W.

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Acts 26 is simply the continuation of the evangelism of Paul even as he stands before governors and kings. Let me remind you that evangelism is simply proclaiming the good news. Did you catch that? It is proclaiming the good news! In other words, evangelism is ACTION. It is not some abstract idea. Evangelism is NOT a notion, a thought, or some theory. Evangelism is what Christians DO. The problem we have is that we equate evangelism with results. If we see converts or church members made, then that is evangelism. No, such things are the results of evangelism, not the action of it. We have seen Paul stand before Governors Felix and Festus as well as before King Agrippa. Not one of these men appears to have been converted, but rest assured, Paul did evangelism.

Beloved, the purpose of the church is to DO evangelism. How is evangelism to be done? Believers are brought into the fellowship to be edified in the knowledge of God so they can be sent out of the fellowship to evangelize; proclaim that knowledge of God. What do we need as a church to be more effective in our evangelistic outreach? Let me tell you that the most powerful weapon we can have is this; a congregation of well-trained, highly motivated believers committed to sharing Christ.

We do not need better tactics or facilities. The pastor does not need blonde highlights in his hair. We do not need louder music or some better means of hiding the fact that our church is meeting in a school cafeteria. What we need to reach Northwest Arkansas with the gospel are holy, adequately equipped people who are desirous of seeing the Holy Spirit work through them. And my question for you is this? Are you ready and willing to be what God has called you to be; an evangelistic tool reaching family, friends, neighbors and co-workers with the gospel?

If we would be ready to proclaim the gospel, we must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We are not to see ourselves as commissioned by Christ to make Jesus acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him.

What must we do? How can we be prepared to be this gospel-communicating tool used by the Holy Spirit? I am glad you asked. We noted last week that one of the key ways in which Paul shared anything about Jesus Christ was by starting with his own personal testimony; his own story of having met Jesus, of having been transformed by Jesus and now actively, purposely, audibly living for Jesus.

Acts 26 offers us a glimpse into the elements that ought to be included in a sharing of one's personal testimony, the account of their coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Let me remind you that when you see Paul using his own personal testimony to speak of Christ, it is concise and to the point. Using Paul's example, there are at least three elements or three areas you want to include in putting your own personal testimony together. We got through the first one and started the second one last week. I will remind you of those before we move on to the third key element to be included in your personal testimony.

The first thing we need to include in our personal testimony seems counter-intuitive at first. First...

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

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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. This shows others our need of Christ and by extension, their own need of Christ. In verses 1-8 we noted two ways in which Paul drew quick attention to himself, first, by...

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

Sharing what our life was like before Christ, and second, by...

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

Sharing what has changed since coming to faith in Jesus Christ. 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 is 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”. 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*.

Rather than being anti-Jewish as he was being charged, Paul turns all this around, revealing himself to be pro-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 – and that is God’s Word. And what specifically was Paul’s hope? Paul says in verse 8, *Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?* Paul’s hope, indeed every Christian’s hope is the same hope that the Jews have had ever since Abraham; the hope and fact of the resurrection.

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...

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

We must quickly point people to Jesus. And this is what we see Paul doing in verses 9-23. We are to share what the Lord has done in our 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.

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First, in verses 9-11, Paul shared what he used to think about Jesus and then in verses 12-18 we see Paul drawing attention to the day of his conversion and he relates the circumstances under which he was saved; reminding us to think back on our lives to remember those times when God convinced you that you were and are a sinner so that you can incorporate that into your testimony. This is where we ended last week, so now let us move forward and show you that our testimonies must not only reveal what the Lord did to convince you of your need of salvation, but next, we must...

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

Paul made it clear that when the Lord entered his life, his life changed radically. But it was not as though Paul just left that change out there in the abstract. Paul's personal testimony contains at least three real changes that took place in his life. The same is to be true and evident in us. What are the three changes that we ought to include in our testimonies?

First, we need to share how we now have a new **Master**. Look with me at verse 19 where we read: ***“So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision...”*** Beloved, the Lord does not come into our lives merely to go along for the ride. He gives the directions! This could be called the first mark of true Christianity, for true saving faith reveals itself in genuine obedience. Paul “did not become” disobedient once he was given his mission to make disciples. How about you? Are you obeying Jesus Christ? In Luke 6:46 Jesus said, ***“Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?”*** If I may be so bold to say, if you are not obeying Jesus, you are not a His disciple. And, if you are not His disciple, you are not saved. People who hear the voice of Jesus are not able to continually ignore it. Paul had a new Master; one that he truly obeyed, that is the first change Paul shares in his personal testimony.

The second change Paul records for himself and ought to be true for all who have faith in Jesus is knowing we have a new **Mission**. Read with me in verses 20-21; ***“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 love that upon receiving the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul wasted no time in obeying the call to make disciples. He did not wait until he got back to Jerusalem. He did not wait until he went back to his home town of Tarsus. Paul started teaching the gospel right where he was saved, in Damascus. And every indication of Luke's account is that Paul continually purposed to fulfill this new, God-given mission, to call people far and wide to do three things. Did you catch them in verse 20? First, to repent (that is to turn from or forsake those things you know to be sin); second, to turn to God (becoming a Christian is not about no longer being influenced by sin, society and/or Satan; but it is about looking to and seeking to know God through Jesus Christ); and third, to prove your repentance by performing deeds appropriate to repentance. Your life is to be a testimony of change; continual, progressive change.

Let us be clear here. No one more fervently rejected salvation by works than Paul; either by way of earning salvation or in order to keep one's salvation. Yet, at the same time, no one more fervently demanded good works as the evidence of salvation than Paul. As the old saying of the Puritans goes; “faith alone saves, but not the faith that is alone.” Can you make a list of godly deeds and actions that demonstrates to you the reality of your faith? The call of the gospel is to trust in Christ, not only to save, but also to work in and through you. You and I have been called to the mission of declaring repentance, turning to God, and performing deeds that are consistent with saving faith.

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This brings us to the third change Paul noted in his life that is to be true in every believer's life; we are to have a new **Message**. In verses 22-23 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.**

What a contrast in messages for Paul. As a Pharisee, Paul had believed and promoted something very different. Rather than salvation by grace; he held to salvation by works. Some have said that today's evangelical church seems to be made up of people who are very much like the Pharisees. Those who are the religious conservatives, who profess to believe the Scriptures, yet those whose lives demonstrate a salvation by personal attainment rather than by particular atonement. Both within and outside the church, people tend to believe some form of this; *If I just do the right things; keep my nose clean; do more good than bad, then God will accept me.* Beloved, that is not the message of the cross. Remember what we noted earlier?

*The cross is a symbol of death. It pictures the abrupt and violent end of a human being. In the days where crucifixion was practiced, the man who took up his cross knew he had started down a road where he had already said good-bye to his family and friends. He knew he was not coming back and that the purpose of taking up the cross was the very end of himself. The cross never made a compromise; never modified anything, spared absolutely nothing; affected every part of the man, completely and decisively. The cross did not seek to be on good terms with its victim. The cross was cruel and hard, and upon finishing its work, the man who was - was no more. That is the message of the Cross.*

Beloved, the message matters; what we communicate about God, man, sin and the cross of Jesus Christ matters. Do you have the message right? When we present the gospel in our personal testimonies, we need to make sure we get the message right. And what is that message? We see it encapsulated in verse 23; that Christ suffered and died (on a cross) in the place of sinners, that He rose from the dead, and that He is the light of the world.

So, to have an effective personal testimony we need to draw attention to ourselves; our past apart from Christ as well as our present now in Christ; we need to draw attention to Christ, sharing how He convinced us of our sin and thus our need of Him along with how He has changed us; now, finally...

### III. We must draw attention to our hearers (24-32)

As part of our personal testimony, we need to be ready to interact with our hearers. It is not to be some “drive-by” – hit and run – stealth and sniper attack. We present ourselves and Christ and then interact. We see Paul interacting with his hearers in three ways; three ways in which we must be ready to interact.

#### A. We must respond to objections (24-26)

When we share the gospel effectively, you can bet there will be some objections. Festus does not disappoint us. In verse 24 we read, **While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.”** It amazes me that a logical, consistent, gracious presentation of the gospel can be met with the charge, “That is crazy! You are insane to believe such nonsense.” Festus thought this of Paul, not when he spoke about persecuting the church but rather when Paul mentioned the notion of someone rising from

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the dead. This simply did not compute for Festus. Paul must be “mad” – a word that meant “a raving maniac.” And notice that Festus was not quiet about, but said it loudly!

When D.L. Moody was a shoe salesman, no one called him crazy for making money. But as soon as he started making disciples for Jesus, people of the time gave him the nickname, “Crazy Moody.” How is sharing Jesus and living for Jesus, being under the blessing of Jesus, crazy? How is that crazy? I will tell what is crazy! Sexually transmitted diseases due to increasing promiscuity and falling morals; that’s crazy. Yet, when we talk about abstinence, what do people say about us? “You’re crazy!” Speak about a global flood that took place about 4,000 years ago and people will say, “You’re crazy.” They say this even though you would expect to find most of the world covered in water if there had been such a flood, just what we find. Meanwhile, on a planet upon which there is no water; people believe that Mars once experienced a global flood. Go figure.

So, how are we to respond? Look what Paul stated in verses 25-26; **25 But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 26 For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.**

Here is a powerful governor, who held Paul’s fate in his hand, so to speak, and yet Paul is not intimidated at all. Why is Paul so confident? I want you to notice something here in verse 26, something we must hold on to and incorporate in our own testimonies. Paul knew that Christianity was historical, factual, and reasonable. Paul never sought to impress his hearers or even to seek his own freedom. Paul’s goal a faithful witness of the truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; that He died for their sins; was buried and raised again on the third day. Is that your goal?

Marty Springstead, who umpired games in Major League Baseball for 20 years and supervised major league umpires as an executive for more than 20 more once shared about his first assignment behind the plate. It was in a 1966 game at Washington. Frank Howard, nicknamed “Hondo” and who was one of the most intimidating players ever, standing 6 feet 8 inches tall, was playing for the Senators. On the very the first pitch to the mountainous slugger, Springstead called a knee-high fast ball a strike. Howard turned around and yelled, “Get something straight, buster! I don’t know where you came from or how you got to the major leagues, but they don’t call that pitch on me a strike. Understand?” The next pitch was in the same spot, and Springstead yelled, “Two!” “Two what?” Howard roared. “Too low,” Springstead said, “Much too low.”

This brings us to what is probably the hardest thing to do when sharing your personal testimony. So often we tell the truth about Christ and what He’s done for us, but then we freeze up. We hem and haw. We stutter around. We break eye contact and feel a sense of awkward self-consciousness. What are we to do at this point? Notice what Paul does next. After responding to the objection, we, like Paul...

### **B. We must ask the question (27-28)**

Let us pick this up by reading Paul’s opening words in 27. Notice what he says, or, what he asks; **“King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.”** These can be some of the hardest words to get out, but they must be said. Paul is turning the attention to his hearer; in this case, King Agrippa and he asks him in effect, “Do you believe? How do you respond to what I

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have just told you?” Having shared what is necessary for a person to be saved, Paul seeks a response.

Paul knows something we would do well to remember. Just knowing the facts about Jesus is not enough. Having someone agree with your argument is not enough. Your personal testimony needs to invite a response. By asking Agrippa if he believed the prophets, Paul put the spotlight on him. If Agrippa were to say ‘yes,’ that he did believe the prophets, then he would be faced with the next, “Is Jesus the one the prophets predicted?” I suspect that the room was getting a bit warm for Agrippa. So, how did Agrippa respond. Look at verse 28, Agrippa replied to Paul, ***“In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”*** It is hard to say whether Agrippa was mocking Paul or if he was making a sincere statement; but one thing is for sure, he knew the spotlight was on him. Paul had made sure of that and did one more thing through his personal testimony that we ought to do as well. Not only did Paul respond to the objection and ask the question, but we, like Paul...

### C. We must seek a response (29-32)

Notice with me what Paul says in verse 29, ***“And Paul said, ‘I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.’”*** What can be easily missed here is Paul’s expanded invitation. Paul is not speaking merely to Agrippa but says this invitation to become a Christian is for ***“all who hear me this day...”*** Paul is praying to God that all who hear him would come to Christ.

As we wrap this up, let us note how people may respond when we share our personal testimonies. **First**, some may seek to change the subject. We see this in verse 30 where we read, ***The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them...*** In other words, this conversation is over. People will try to move on to something else.

But there is also a **second** reaction as some will focus on the messenger rather than upon the message; that is, they will start to talk about you rather than about Christ. We see this in verses 31-32, ***31 and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, ‘This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.’ 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’*** There is no word here about the message Paul shared, but rather about the messenger. How many times have I heard words like, “You’re a good man, Pastor. Thanks for sharing that with me. I wish there were more people like you around.” Beloved, the message is not about me, or you; it is about Christ.

Now then, when you give your personal testimony, understand that everyone you share with will respond. I promise you that. They will respond. Some will say either in word or in action, “I’m just not ready. I need time to think about this. Such a person is responding; he is saying no to Christ. Some will say in effect, “I need to clean up my life before I think about Jesus. He is responding. Again, he is saying no to Christ. For the one who demands a sign from God first; he is responding; saying no to Christ. Everyone responds to the gospel; even each of you today.

How did Paul leave that hall of pomp and circumstance? Yes, he was in chains, but in reality he was the only one who was free. For Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, and most if not all the rest of those dignitaries left still enslaved to their sins. While Festus and Agrippa thought they were the judges over Paul’s trial; it was rather that Paul was the judge over their trial. They had heard the gospel, yet, by every indication, they rejected it. This was their response.

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Beloved, I urge you to prepare your personal testimony. But to do so, I need to first ask you; do you have a personal story; that is, have you come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? And then to add to that, let me ask you this, do others see this story as being true of you. There are many who have wondrous stories about coming to Christ, but their current lives reveal nothing of the power and wonder of the gospel at work. Beloved, ungodly living will always speak louder than your words. Make sure you are living by the life changing power of the gospel.

And finally, let me ask you this; are you sharing your story, your personal testimony of coming to faith in Christ. Would you consider writing it out this week and then seek to share it with others. You will be amazed what God will do with your personal testimony.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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