

TESTIFYING ABOUT CHRIST

11 October, 2009

By Rev. Lonny R. Bower

Scripture Reference – Acts 26:1-32

Unit Theme: The Expanding Church

Central Truth: Christians are to witness about Christ.

Focus: Review Paul's testimony before Agrippa and use it as a model for witnessing of Christ.

Key Verse: Acts 26:22

Introduction:

In keeping with our unit theme – “The Expanding Church” today's lesson focuses on witnessing of Christ, if believers do not witness, the church will not expand. Before we go too far, note that we are witnesses of Christ, not for Christ. The reason for this is simple really, yet two fold. First, to be a witness one has to have witnessed (have first hand knowledge of) the event or person to whom they are witnessing for. Consider the resurrection of Christ as an example – though Christians know that Christ is risen none living today could be an affective witness to His resurrection in a court of law – all they have is what they believe to be true, none have seen the physical presence of Jesus (at least I've met none who have). The second reason that we witness of Christ and not for Christ is found in **John 15:26, 27** and **1 John 5:6-13**. Those who believe, have a testimony of what Christ has done in and for them. As believers begin to share this testimony the Spirit will be their witness just as He is Christ's witness. He is the one who convicts of sin and righteousness (John 16:8) and He is the one who draws souls to the Father. One can only witness of what they know to be true, therefore if there is a lack of transformation there remains no testimony and where there is no testimony there is no overcoming (Revelation 12:11). The truth of the matter is this, believers on Christ inherently become witness of Christ because of the work Christ has done in them. 2 Corinthians 5:17 sets forth the charge, *if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away....* Transformation is the key to ones testimony of Christ, for what better way can one witness of Christ's resurrection power than to let the world see and hear about the transformation he wrought in them. Paul never lost sight of his purpose and calling – to be a witness of Christ and His mighty work. Though his circumstances leading up to today's lesson were less than desirable by anyone's standards (Acts 24-25), he used them as leverage to testify of the power and reality of the living Christ to Agrippa and the entire royal court. Though we may never stand before heads of state and testify of Christ, we live our lives everyday before the world – I wonder what they see and hear.

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I. Life Before Conversion – Acts 26:1-11

The one thing that we have that no one else has is our story. We all came from different places and have likewise experienced different things. Some may have a more interesting story than others, but if Christ is in it we all have a story worth telling. Paul begins to share about his life prior to meeting the living Christ – the Messiah. He tells King Agrippa how he clung to the hope of God’s promise (that God would send the Messiah) and in fact it is the same hope that all Jews cling to. The malicious Jews did not know or understand that if they or anyone had any hope of salvation their Messiah must die. They thought they had killed Jesus and they were right, they did. However, they grossly underestimated the power of God! They chose to remain ignorant to the fact of the resurrection of Christ. They did not understand that if there was ever a hope of anyone being resurrected from the dead to eternal life that the Messiah would have to rise first. It is this hope that Paul alludes to and for which he was being persecuted for, the hope of the resurrection. In fact he would expound on it in his letter to the Corinthians (**1 Corinthians 15:12-19**). Paul was not ashamed to admit that he himself was once ignorant to the power of Christ. He tells Agrippa how he personally opposed Christ and even persecuted all who would presume to follow Him. He is simply sharing his story, so that Agrippa would see the power of God manifest in and through his life.

➤ **Think about it:**

What is your story – is Christ in it?

“You cannot change the past, and you can’t always control the present, but you can push the past into its proper perspective and you can face the present realistically.”—*Hugh Fellows*

II. Encounter With the Living Christ – Acts 26:12-18

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus will ever stand as a unique story among stories. There are few Christians who have such a dramatic conversion, however there are few who have such zeal for their Lord. Psalms 69:9 says the zeal for your house consumes me (NIV). Saul was consumed with zeal for the Lord and His holy word; in his **carnal understanding** however he viewed

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Christ as a threat to Judaism and all Christ followers as blasphemers because they proclaimed the Lordship of Jesus. Therefore it was his intent to stamp them out and he was convinced that he was in God's will for this was what he was called to do. Proverbs 16:25 says there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Saul was headed for death; this is the story of all who work against the will of God – death. To kick against the goads is simple to go against, or work against God's will. Jesus told Paul that it is difficult to work against my will. In other words, you will not be able to stop me Saul of Tarsus I am Jesus and I have included you in my will that all men come to repentance. Isn't it wonderful to know that whatever you have done, wherever you have been, the Lord's desire is to save you. Saul of Tarsus encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. It is interesting to me that while he traveled on a road with seemingly no crossroads – he came to one. Saul had a choice, he could rise up mount his horse and return to Jerusalem, or he could believe the word of the Lord and go on to Damascus, but for a whole different purpose. He would choose the later and as a result would never be the same again, nor would the world. Titus 2:11 says that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men. This means that every man will reach the same crossroad that Saul came to, though it may not be as dramatic, it is nonetheless just as significant. Once there we have an opportunity to change our life story and encounter the power of the risen savior. It is this story that Paul now shares with Agrippa, I am sure that everyone to include his persecutors who heard him speak listened intently not fully realizing that they were now at that same crossroad.

➤ **Think about it:**

When was the last time you shared your story?

“Preaching . . . is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself.”—*P.T. Forsyth*

III. Obedience to Christ's Call – Acts 26:19-29

Of all the things we think most important in life, all pale in comparison to obedience to the Lord. It was on the road to Damascus that Saul received his call and it would prove to be a call that

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would cost him dearly. Now in chains he continues to proclaim the power of the gospel the very thing he was called to do. As we have noted several times over the last few weeks opposition is certain to come upon all who would be so bold to answer the call to preach. However, when our lives are over and we have no time left but to reflect, will we be able to say as Paul did in 2 Timothy 4:7 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*". Paul continually lived his life as to please the Lord, not man. Even in the court of heads of state he was faithful to preach, and did not draw back when rebuked by Festus. He was discerning enough to know that Agrippa was on the verge of believing and used this to his advantage. Knowing that Christ died and rose again for all was the very thing that motivated Paul. He could not but help to preach the gospel; in fact, he said woe unto me if I do not preach (1 Corinthians 9:16), we would do well to learn from Paul's words – woe unto us if we are not obedient to the call of Christ on our lives. The cost of not being obedient to Christ far outweighs anything we may go through for the sake of righteousness. The consequences of rebellion are eternal, however the persecution we may suffer from men because of our obedience to Christ are only temporal. Look at what Paul's obedience cost him (**2 Corinthians 11:22-29**). Now look at the eternal (**Philippians 3:7-14**).

➤ **Think about it:**

Where do you stand in relation to your call – have you been obedient?

"For man to be lost, in all his uniqueness and wonder, is tragedy ." —*Francis Shaeffer*

Conclusion:

One of the greatest challenges facing the church today is the carnal nature. Paul told the Romans to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:6). There is little life and peace is all but absent from many Christians today. The reason for this is the carnal nature, few can identify with the statement by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17.... It is the decision they made to return from where they came instead of go on to where Christ

