

Derek French:

One of the joys for every Christian believer is to share how Jesus has met with them and changed their lives, and Paul was no exception to this. Even though he'd been falsely accused by Jews and was in Roman custody, being given an opportunity to speak of all that Jesus had done for him was something he both relished and used eagerly.

Paul is giving his testimony before King Agrippa, the Roman governor Festus and other prominent figures of the day. Last time we saw how Paul had spoken of his life before he was a Christian believer, with complete honesty. Back then he hated Jesus and anyone to do with him, and went about causing havoc as he tried to disrupt the spread of the good news Jesus brings.

We left it last time with Paul travelling to Damascus with the intention to arrest Christian believers there, when a bright light from heaven shone around him, blinding him. It was then he heard the voice of one he never thought he ever would, namely the risen Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke to him by name, demanding to know why Paul, known as Saul at that time, was persecuting him. Shaken to his very core, Paul asked who it was that was speaking with him, and he was told it was Jesus, the very one he was persecuting.

The shock of what he heard must have stunned Paul, but Jesus was not going to destroy this man, but amazingly he was going to use him for the spread of his kingdom.

To help us again, Phillippa Chrispin is going to read from Acts chapter 26. She'll start at verse 12 and go down to verse 23, following which Gerard Chrispin will explain them to us.

Phillippa Chrispin:

*'While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 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. And when we had all 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.'*

*'So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 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. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 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.'*

*“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 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. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 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 — 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.”*

Gerard Chrispin:

Even at this time of trauma, confusion, bewilderment, guilt and helplessness, Jesus already began to indicate to Paul that he neither abandoned him to judgement nor wrote him off. The Saviour told him to, 'rise and stand on your feet.' When Jesus deals with a rebel sinner, he often humbles him first. The sinner's pride, selfishness, self-reliance and self-effort all need to be broken. He needs to sense his guilt, shame, helplessness and inadequacy. This is how God makes the guilty sinner turn from sin and to trust and obey Jesus. In trusting Christ, God's mercy and grace lift him.

Acts 26 is the only one of the three conversion accounts revealing that Jesus told Paul why he was dealing with him in that way at that time. He had two roles for Paul to play soon. He would be Christ's 'minister', meaning 'servant' and also his witness. A good witness in court is honest, reliable and of good reputation. He has seen and heard first hand evidence that he shares in court. Jesus would make Paul into his witness to tell what he has already witnessed (he has just met the risen Lord who died for him), and what God, through the Holy Spirit, would reveal to him. That is why, under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, Paul was used to write so much of God's word in the New Testament.

God promised Paul that he would deliver him from both the Jews and the Gentiles. The book of Acts is clear testimony to the way God kept that promise. Paul's God-aided task was to open their eyes in order to

turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Why? First, to receive forgiveness, and second, to receive a glorious eternal inheritance, along with all those who are set apart for the Lord Jesus Christ through their personal, saving faith placed in their once crucified and now risen saviour.

In short, Paul has been saved to take the life-changing gospel of the Lord Jesus to lost and guilty souls, to save them from judgement and hell, assure them of forgiveness in heaven and change their lives so much that a watching world knows that Jesus is alive in them.

Paul now tells a listening king how he obeyed what Jesus told him in that vision on the Damascus road. He has visited the areas where once he hunted Christians: Damascus, Jerusalem, and Judea, to share the gospel of repentance. Evidence by changed lives showing how real that repentance is.

He then took the same message to the Gentiles. Paul repeats that this is why the Jews wanted to kill him. They tried to do so after seizing him in the temple. But Paul testifies to God's deliverance as he promised, so he still witness to the great, like his current heroes, and to ordinary insignificant and overlooked people who he meets day by day.

He shares the saving message which the Old Testament prophets and Moses had predicted would come. What is that message of light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles? No prize for guessing! Paul has made it abundantly clear all along. Wherever he goes he shares it. His message is still basically two-fold. First, Christ would suffer, which he did supremely in loving us enough to die on Calvary's cross, where he bore our sins and God's punishment for them.

Second, he would be the first to rise from the dead, which Jesus mightily and miraculously accomplished in his resurrection from that borrowed tomb on the third day.

Paul puts it like this to the church at Corinth: 'I delivered to you first of all, that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.' That is the heart of the gospel that brings forgiveness, eternal life and personal peace.

Are those twin truths more important to you than anything else? If so, have you benefitted from them by committing your life to Jesus? Is your answer, 'Yes' to that? If so, are you sharing the message of forgiveness and new life with others now by explaining to them why Jesus died and rose again?

Derek French:

That really is a vital challenge from Gerard and one we must take seriously, because the one thing above all else that our world needs to know is the saving love and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this privilege of telling others about the Saviour which he gives to his dear children in the world today. Clearly, this is something we need to earnestly pray about. Do you remember how Paul brought this issue before the Christian believers in Colossae? We read in Colossians 4 from verse 2 of these instructions: 'Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.'

Gospel work is not an easy work therefore we need the help of the Lord to give us opportunities to tell people about Jesus. We need to be willing to speak for him, wherever we may find ourselves, and we need his help so that we can explain the gospel of Christ as clearly and simply as we possibly can so that all our listeners understand what Jesus alone can do for them.

What's so inspiring about Paul's request for prayer so he could share the good news with others is that he was in prison at that time. Even there, he wanted to tell others about his Saviour, Jesus. Paul knew that without faith in Christ, men and women and boys and girls would perish and be lost forever, so it is of paramount importance that they should be told about the only one who can rescue them from their own sin and give them peace with God: Jesus Christ the crucified one.

This is why, when speaking to a king or governor or anyone else, Paul graciously, compassionately, and earnestly told them that Jesus died on the cross, was buried and rose again so as to be the saviour of all who turn to him in humble repentance and faith. Forgiveness of sins is found nowhere else. Everyone must turn to Jesus and trust in what he did on the cross if they're going to be sure of a place reserved in heaven for them. Even important kings like Agrippa and governor like Festus need this same humble repentance, and to place their faith in Christ.

Remember, Jesus himself said, in John 14 verse 6, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.’ And Peter declared about Jesus in Acts 4 verse 12, ‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.’