Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Paul Before Agrippa, Part 2: The Commencement of Paul's Testimony
Scripture: Acts 26:4-18
Code: 1797

Turn in your Bible to Acts 25 and I just want to get us back in the study of Paul and Agrippa and Bernice. I never realized that there would be such a stir, but all the people who have been named Bernice had a terrible week. I want you to know that, but we're back to Acts 25 and Paul before the court of Festus not really a court in a technical sense, but a kingly court at this point because Agrippa and Bernice have arrived with all their entourage. The title of the section that we're looking at Acts 25:13 through 26:32, which is a large bulk of Scripture, but the section is Are You Trying to Convert Me? Chapter 26:28, keys us in on that title. When Paul is finished with his testimony king Agrippa says in effect, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian? Are you trying with so few words to convert me? And of course the answer to the apostle Paul was yes, that's obviously what I'm trying to do, not only you but everybody else in the room.

I told you at the beginning of our study of the life of Paul as a prisoner that he would give six major testimonies. This is the fifth. Repeatedly he is called upon to answer actuations. He has been accused of sedition. The Jews accused him of stirring up trouble against Rome. He has been accused of sectarianism, of being a religious heretic. He has been accused of sacrilege, of blaspheming God by desecrating the temple. He didn't do any of those things. He was totally exonerated on all counts by all courts because there was no evidence, there were no eyewitnesses, there was nothing that stood up in the court and yet even though he was innocent he maintains his prison status. And the reason is simple. The Roman governors now have him as a prisoner. Felix, even though he was innocent, wouldn't let him go because he knew that would upset the Jews and therefore upset the political applecart in Judea. Festus, then when he came to take the governorship found himself having Paul in custody, he too did not want to release him because he didn't want to upset the Jews for the Jews wanted him dead. And so in a sense, both of these governors had been blackmailed into keeping Paul a prisoner.

Now Festus has run into a stone wall because the apostle Paul has appealed to Rome, since he couldn't get any justice in Caesarea, he decided to do what all Roman citizens had the right to do and that was appeal to Caesar and his case must be removed to Rome. The problem is that Festus has to send him now to Rome without any written accusation because he can't find anything to accuse him of. And so he's struggling with this terrible problem of sending a prisoner to Rome but not having anything to accuse him of that qualifies him to be a prisoner or to be a tried person.

Well at that particular time in the dilemma of Festus, King Agrippa who was a vassal king, Rome really rules, but they allow him to run the temple and appoint the priests, Herod Agrippa arrives on the scene paying a courtesy call to Festus and at this point Festus sees a possible way out. He figures if he can get Agrippa to listen to this man Agrippa may come up with some viable accusation that Festus can write down on paper and use to accuse Paul so that the trial in Rome will have some justification and Festus will be able to keep his balance in terms of the Jews and their attitude toward him.

Now in the midst of this situation where Paul is giving testimony to Agrippa so that Agrippa might be able to come up with some accusation to help Festus out of his problem, in the midst of this what stands out is that more than the testimony Paul gives to defend himself is the testimony that he gives to Agrippa to try to convert Agrippa into a Christian. He actually targets in on Agrippa and attempts to get him to respond to the Gospel and even gives an invitation at the end.

I don't think Paul had to come to this hearing because I think legally his appeal to Rome had to be honored, but I think he came because he saw it as an opportunity to preach the gospel. Festus looked at this thing as an opportunity to get an accusation. Agrippa looked at it as a curiosity. He wanted to hear this guy anyway. Paul looked at it as an opportunity to preach the gospel. And so it's the testimony of Paul in Caesarea in the Roman praetorian before Agrippa the king and Bernice and all their entourage and Festus and all the chief captains and all the famous and high up people in the city of Caesarea are there as well, so it's a very august body.

As we look at this thing we're reminded again of the one great passion that Paul had in situations like that and that is to preach the gospel. It didn't matter to him about his own security, it didn't matter to him about his own embarrassment, it didn't matter to him that people would think he was strange, it didn't matter that they might even think he was nuts, because that's exactly what they did think. But none of that bothered him at all. It didn't matter whether they put him in chains, put him in jail, or killed him. You see boldness is born of the consciousness that I am expendable. For the cause of Christ he believed it so he was bold.

One of the great passions of the apostle Paul we see illustrated here was the passion to preach the gospel. It didn't matter where he was or what the circumstances were that was his desire. And this goes back to what he said and I want you to turn to it. In II Corinthians 5 and this is the theology or the base of theology on which Paul operates in Acts 25 and 26. There are principles out of which he acts. The act of evangelizing in Acts 25 and 26 is based upon his attitudes revealed here. And he tells them to the Corinthians and to us as well.

II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." In the first place Paul believed that the gospel was a transforming fact. If any man be in Christ he is what, a new creation. Now because Paul believed

that, that became motivation for him. You know when you have confidence in the product it tends to motivate you. He believed in what the gospel could accomplish; therefore, he was motivated by it. It's hard to sell something you're not convinced of isn't it? Hard to promote something you don't believe in. Well Paul believed in the transforming power of the gospel and that was the basis of his desire too proclaim it.

Now watch verse 18: "And all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Now the word reconcile is the most interesting word. It literally means to bring back into proper adjustment. To bring back into proper adjustment. The New Testament uses it only of men, never of God. God never needs to be reconciled. God is never out of adjustment.

Some people would say, "Well God is reconciled to man." No. God is not reconciled to man. The proper use of the word is to be out of adjustment, to be brought back into proper adjustment. God is never out of adjustment. Man is out of adjustment. It is man that must be brought back into proper adjustment to God. That's the ministry of reconciliation. So, the Bible here tells us that we have been given the ministry of adjusting people rightly to God. We're in the business of converting people from maladjusted anti God, to well adjusted God oriented people. We're in the business of bringing men to the place where they can become in Christ a new creation with old things having passed away and all things becoming new.

Verse 19 says, "To wit that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." He's given us this gospel message, which is the word of reconciliation and we're to carry it out, which is the ministry of reconciliation. We are ambassadors. An ambassador is a foreigner in a land representing the foreign government and that's what we are. We represent the government of God in a foreign land, don't we? We are ambassadors. And what does an ambassador do? What does the ministry of reconciliation involve? "As though God did beech you by us we beg you in Christ stead, be reconciled to God." It is a tremendous driving passionate activity that we must be engaged in. It is begging people to be converted. It is pleading with people. There's nothing wrong with begging people to come to Christ. That's what Paul says, "We beg you in Christ's stead be reconciled to God. Be rightly adjusted to God.

We have been committed then to this ministry, the ministry of reconciliation. And there must be connected with it a tremendous sense of urgency. For you'll notice verse 2 it says, or verse 1. Let's read them both of 6. "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation." And so Paul says we have been granted the word of reconciliation, that's the gospel of proper adjustment, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation, that's carrying the gospel of proper

adjustment, and there is an urgency about it so that today is the day it must be done.

Now we are placed in this world to bring maladjusted men into adjustment with God and that involves conversion. When Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you trying to convert me?" He put his finger right on what is the goal and objective of every believer who confronts an unbeliever. We're in the business of converting people in the power of the Holy Spirit. You know as I mentioned before we can get so smug in our sanctification and so happy in our fellowship, and so blessed with what's going on among the Christians, and so oriented to the Christian community we forget the whole world of people that are going to hell constantly. And we must keep that perspective.

At the end of the gospel of Mark our Lord in laying down the simple commission said this, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Can't be much simpler than that. At the end of the gospel of Luke in Chapter 24:46 he said to them, "Thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and remission or forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses." You see the commission is clear as to what we are to do.

Going back to Acts Chapter 25 and 26, Paul understood his calling. He understood it from the very first day of his conversion. Look at 26:16, "When the Lord said rise," at the Damascus road there, "He said rise and stand on your feet, I've appeared to thee for a purpose, to make or appoint you a minister and a witness of these things, which you have seen and those things which I'll appear unto you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send you, to open their eyes to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." You see Paul says the Lord told me that I had been given a ministry of turning people from darkness to light, from Satan to God. It was a commitment to turn people, to convert people.

Notice verse 17, "Delivering you from the people," that's the Jews, "And the Gentiles," the Gentiles, "Unto whom now I send you." Now watch. When you were saved God took you out of the world to send you back to the world, you see? Now notice it, "Delivering you from the people and the Gentiles unto whom I now send you." I took you out of the world to send you back to the world. Now that's the ministry committed to us. And I fear in my own heart that we as Christians, especially here when we can become so satisfied with learning and satisfied with fellowship and satisfied with unity and satisfied with growth, forget about the fact that we have been taken out of the world not to be cloistered like a bunch of monastics, but to be sent back to the world to try to transform people in the energy of the Holy Spirit.

This is the gospel call. This is the gospel commission. When the apostle Paul said, "Pray for me," in Ephesians 6:;19, he said, "And pray for me that utterance may be given to me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds that in this I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." He says, "Pray for me because I ought to speak the

gospel boldly." That's a prayer we ought to pray for each other, isn't it?

When Paul said to Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist. Make full proof of the ministry," he was saying that in order for you to make full proof of the ministry you're going to have to do some evangelism. I always remember the kid that said to me, "I don't think I have the gift of evangelism." I said, That's interesting. Nobody has the gift of evangelism. You just have the command." It isn't an isolated gift, it's something that all of us do. Do the work of an evangelist. Change people. Were in the business of changing people's lives. As somebody says, "Are you trying to convert me?" Of course we are. What else, that's our call. We're doing it lovingly, I trust. We care. Paul's task was clear.

We find the apostle Paul has given this opportunity to preach the gospel before these very very highbrow people and he takes seizing the opportunity the marvelous privilege the Spirit of God gives him. Now as he begins his testimony, which as you remember is sort of entertainment for Agrippa, desperately important for Festus whose got to get an accusation, and tremendously opportunistic for Paul because he can proclaim the gospel. We saw last time beginning in 25:13, the consultation regarding his testimony. Festus spoke with Agrippa when he arrived with Bernice and he told him all about this prisoner that he had that the Jews wanted dead, but they couldn't find any justification to kill the guy 'cause it didn't seem like he'd done anything. The only thing he was guilty of was talking about somebody who was dead that he claimed to be alive somebody named Jesus. And Festus said to Agrippa, "Frankly Agrippa, I don't understand all this Jewish questions, verse 20, I don't understand. I'm perplexed about this whole set up of Jewish theology and I don't know what to do about it. Would you stick around tomorrow and listen to this guy and make some sense out of it and maybe I can write some accusation and sent it along to Rome? Agrippa says in verse 22, "I sure will. Tomorrow I'll do it." And he says, "Tomorrow you'll hear him." So the consultation regarding Paul's testimony.

Secondly was the circumstances of his testimony. Verses 23 to 27. Remember what the scene was like? That the praetorian, the auditorium, the place of hearing where Festus was it used to be the Herod's palace. That place was just loaded with all of the higher ups and the king and Bernice came in and all the falderal and it was with great pomp, it says in verse 23, which is the word fantasia. It was just a colossal stupendous display of fancy this and fancy that and all the pomp that goes with the king and the whole big setting was there and into the thing marched the apostle Paul into such circumstances. And at that point Agrippa took charge and began the questioning of Paul and we come to point three the commencement of Paul's testimony, verse 1 of Chapter 26.

The commencement of Paul's testimony: Now this is basically where we left off last time. Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself." Now he begins his testimony here and it begins with a courtesy. He's very courteous and I think rightly so. He's not flattery. He's just being courteous and what he says is true.

"I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee concerning all the things of which I'm accused of the Jews." Why are you so happy about it, Paul? "Especially because I know thee to be an expert in all customs and question, which are among the Jews. Wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently." He says, "Agrippa I'm really happy to talk to you because you know you're an expert in all of this," and I think in his mind, as I mentioned last time, he felt that Agrippa would be objective.

The Jerusalem leaders and the Jerusalem Jews were so biased, they were so hateful of Rome, they despised Rome, they hated Paul desperately, but here was Agrippa, though he was a Jew, a man who had been educated in Rome, a man whose total allegiance was toward Rome, a man who played politics with Israel but really down in his heart he was a Roman. And Paul felt number one, this guy being Jewish will understand the character of my argument. Number two being Roman he'll be more objective in evaluating it. He won't be swayed by the terrible Jewish hatred of Jesus Christ, by the terrible Jewish antagonism.

So he felt he maybe had a live one on the wire. Maybe he had a guy who could actually have his life changed, a person who was an open part who could hear the gospel and so he uses this as an opportunity to try to convert Agrippa. And in it he gives his testimony.

Now mark this. His message keys around this: Christ is the Messiah as proven by his resurrection. His resurrection is proven by my transformed life. And in this thing he goes through how his life was transformed when he met Christ on the road to Damascus and in effect he's saying, "Listen I couldn't argue when the Lord Jesus Christ himself, alive from the dead struck me down on the road to Damascus, changed my life, commissioned me into the ministry, how could I argue against that? He has to be the Messiah. He has to be the Savior. That's his whole argument. And we'll see it unfold this time and the next time we study together.

All right let's look and see what happens following the courtesy. Paul then begins to give his testimony and he wants to give his testimony from the first because he wants the people to see the change in his life that Christ made. One of the great proofs of Christianity is it not is the transformed life. Don't you remember that Paul said that in II Corinthians 5:17, which you read. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation." This is one of the great motives of evangelism. This is one of the great testimonies of the gospel what Christ has done in a life. And he's saying, "Agrippa, I want you to know what this Jesus did." Now Agrippa didn't need to hear the facts of Jesus dying and so forth. He knew all that. He needed to hear what Christ had done in his resurrection power and so that's what Paul wants to tell him and everybody else who hears.

So he begins with his conduct. Look at verses 4 and 5. He describes his early life. "My manner of life from my youth, which was a first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews who knew me from the beginning, if they would testify that after the strict sect of our religion I lived a

Pharisee." He says you know from the earliest years of my life I was educated at Jerusalem. And all the Jews know this. And if they had the courage to testify they would have to admit that I belonged to the strictest sect of our religion. I lived a Pharisee. Now Pharisee was the strict legalist and he was even at the strict end of the strict legalists. He was a right-wing right-wing Pharisee.

So he says my manner of life from my youth I was trained in Orthodox Judaism right here in Jerusalem and all the Jews know this. They know I sat at the feet of Gamaliel. They know that after the strictest sect, and Paul does something here in using the word strictest that Greek writers are allowed to, to that you're never allowed to do in English comp. He uses a double superlative. And a double superlative really lays heavy emphasis in the Greek. What he says is I belong to the most strictest sect. He is laying tremendous weight on this emphasis. He stresses that if anybody ever lived who was convinced that Judaism was the final word of God it was me. I belonged to the farthest farthest farthest extreme legal view and everybody knows I did. You see what he was doing? He's setting them up for the transformation. He's showing them how zealous he was as a Jew in order that they might understand the tremendous cataclysmic effect of the transformation that occurred at Damascus.

And so Paul stresses I believe in the strictest way in all the facets of Judaism, I was a Pharisee. Having talked about the conduct of his past life he now goes into his condemnation, verses 6 to 8. "And now I stand and am condemned or judged. I'm condemned for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers." He says, "I was raised a Jew. I was a Pharisee and now I am being condemned and you know why I am being condemned? I am being condemned for believing the promises that God made to the Jewish fathers."

You say well is this hope? Look at it in verse 6. "For the hope of the promise." Listen what was the Jewish hope? The Jewish hope is this: and this is the context here, the Jewish hope was the coming of Messiah. The hope of every Jew was Messiah would come and deliver Israel. Why Israel had been struggling against bondage from Egypt right up until this time they were still under Rome. They had had some years of independence. They had had some years of successes and enlargement under David. But for the most part they knew nothing but fighting and struggling and slavery.

And certainly from the time of 586 B.C. from the time of the Gentiles right on through they had known abject slavery and ruling first by Babylon and then by the Persians and then by the Greeks and now by the Romans. And they longed for the hope to come, the Messiah to come, and they believed this: that when Messiah came He would set up His kingdom and that even the dead Jews would be resurrected to enjoy that kingdom. They believed that. That was their hope. Why Job even way back said, "Though my body be consumed the worms destroy this body, he said, thought my range be consumed within me yet in my flesh shall I see God whom I shall see for myself and not another." See they knew all along there was a resurrection. The resurrection was their hope that Messiah would come deliver Israel, set up His kingdom, raise the dead Jews to enjoy the kingdom.

Friends, that's going to happen isn't it? They were anticipating it in the past. So he says, "I'm being condemned for believing what all the Jews believe," which is true. He just believed what everybody believed who was at all faithful to Judaism. Now verse 7 he goes further. "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God say and night, hope to come." He says, "Look, this isn't anything that I've invented. Our whole twelve tribes agree to this." Want to know something interesting about that statement? Twelve tribes, that proves that Paul was not a British Israelite. Paul didn't believe there were only two tribes and the other ten were lost. You say, "What's that?" Well that's that stuff that's propagated by Herbert W. Armstrong, Garner Ted Armstrong and the World Tomorrow and a few other heretics. Incidentally if you're listening to that man you can probably list about 20 heresies. He doesn't just have one, the worst being salvation by works. But they teach that the ten tribes that went north, the Israel part of the divided kingdom, migrated to England and became the British people and that we; therefore, are descendents of the British; therefore, all the promises given to Israel are fulfilled to the British and to the Americans. What it is is a mask for anti-Semitism.

But Paul didn't believe that because Paul says that the twelve tribes are still together and that's what the Bible teaches. That before those ten tribes had migrated away individual members of all those ten tribes had filtered down into the two tribes in the south so that the two tribes really became a composite of all the twelve. So that even though the people of the north left the twelve tribes are intact in the south.

So Paul says that the twelve tribes still earnestly hope for the coming of Messiah. So he says this is a total Jewish hope. This doesn't just belong to me. I'm only believing what all the Jews have believed, all twelve tribes, and now I'm being condemned for it. Verse 7 in the middle, "For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews." I'm being accused for Messianic hope. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead? You certainly can't be hung up on the fact that God raised the dead. I mean that's something we've all believed. Why am I suffering this abuse and condemnation for simply believing what has always been believed? Common Jewish hope in the resurrection, that's not incredible. Can the Pharisees argue against the resurrection? Can the Pharisees say that I am condemned because I believe in the resurrection? Of course not.

Well Agrippa is probably at this time saying, "Sure, sure, Paul we know that. That's it alright to believe in the resurrection, but what we don't buy is that Jesus is the resurrected Messiah." You know Paul knew that's what Agrippa would think. He knew that. He knew Agrippa would be thinking along that line. He knew that the Jews did believe in the resurrection but that they wouldn't accept the resurrection of Jesus. And one of the most startling acts of willful rejection anywhere in Scripture you have Matthew 28:11. Just listen: this is after the resurrection, "And when they were going behold some of the watch, some of the Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb, came to the city showed the chief priests all that was done." The Romans came in and said, "I hate to tell you this,

but there was a resurrection." "And the chief priests got assembled with the elders and took much counsel and gave much money to the soldiers."

Now if you know anything about how the Jews hated the Romans you know they wouldn't want to give them any money. They would have despised the fact of giving them money. You say, "Why did they do it?" What do you think it was? Bribery! They said, "Say this: his disciples came by night and stole him while we slept." Now that's a real bright statement. If they were asleep how could they possibly testify that while they were asleep the disciples came and stole the body? They bought them off. And if you get in trouble with the Roman governor for sleeping we'll take care of that. "So they took the money and did as they were taught and this is the saying commonly reported among the Jews until this day." They still believe it. And it tells in the Bible how it all started. The soldiers were bribed. Willful rejection! So it might have been fine for Agrippa to say, "That's great, Paul. I believe in the resurrection. That's a Jewish hope, that's great, but we just don't believe Jesus rose from the dead." And so that launches Paul knowing that Agrippa's thinking that, and Paul was the master of analyzing the response and then reacting to it.

Look at the book of Romans. He answers all the questions that you're thinking but never ask. The same thing happens here. He knows that Agrippa's question is regarding Jesus, not the totality of the resurrection. So we come down to the fourth concept at the beginning of his testimony, the confession. Now watch verse 9. "I verily thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." He says Agrippa, in effect I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that's fine, Paul, we're not hassled with the resurrection, its just Jesus Christ that bothers us. And he says, "You know, I had the same problem Agrippa. I thought that it was right to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. I used to, why 25 years ago I was in the same boat you're in. I thought the same way. I understand how you feel, Agrippa." Well you know that's really devastating when you can read a man's mind. Of course that's part of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And Paul pours out his heart in confession. And I know this is a painful thing for him. If anything in his life sort of rang in his conscience is the fact that he had slaughtered Christians, that he had compelled Christians to blaspheme the name of Christ. Even though he was redeemed that thing was always in his mind that he had done that.

And so this is confession. Verse 9, "I used to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I did in Jerusalem and many of the saints that I shut up in prison having received authority from the chief priests, he indicts them, and when they were put to death I gave my vote, literally, my vote against them and the Greek word is the word for the little pebble that was used in the Sanhedrin to cast a vote, which indicates probably that Paul is referring to the fact that he was a member of the Sanhedrin and he actually voted in the death of Christians.

And so I have my vote against them. Verse 11, "And I punished often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme." In other words he tried to force the Christians to recant their faith, to

blaspheme God or else kill them. And being exceedingly mad against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. I mean this guy was the chief officer of the Jewish inquisition. He was after Christians. He was a mad man. The Bible says he was breathing in threatening and slaughtering; he was like a huffing puffing dragon slaughtering Christians. He hated it he despised it. By compelled them to blaspheme. No wonder he saw himself as the chief of sinners spending years doing that, and if they wouldn't blaspheme he made them martyrs.

So he says, "Listen Agrippa, I'm being condemned for believing what all Jews believe and I know it isn't just that it's Jesus Christ, and I know how it is because I used to feel that way about Christ and I didn't believe He was the Messiah and I was really strong. I went out under the authority of the Jews and I slaughtered Christians." And then it happened.

In verse 12, begins his conversion. This is the dramatic high point of the commencement of his testimony. He was persecuting them in foreign cities and one of the foreign cities he was heading for was Damascus, a city that still exists and we were there last summer, many memories there. "Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun."

My friends, that's bright because the sun at midday in the Middle East is really really bright. And above the midday sun he saw a light, "shining round about me and them who journeyed with me." We were drowned in this light beyond the light of the sun. "And when we were all fallen to the earth I heard a voice speaking to me saying in the Hebrew," or the common language Aramaic, "Saul, Saul, why are you continuing to persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." What it really as like saying Saul, give up, you can't win. Why are you continuing to do this against such odds? The implication here is that Paul was terribly unsuccessful, that he had a miserable time trying to get Christians to recant and blaspheme. Unsuccessful! He was fighting something that he was supposed to be submitting to. It was a losing battle. He was smashing his head against a stone wall. He was trying to kick against the goads. Goads were little sharp things. Let me give you a little idea of what they were. When a young ox was first being trained to be tied up to a yoke to pull a single plow, one ox on a single plow, the ox upon being tied would kick naturally trying to throw off the yoke. And so the farmer would have a long stick and the end would be sharpened down, very hard wood, to a point like a pume, like a spear. And when the ox began to kick he merely took the stick and held it behind the heels of the ox in the yoke. And as the ox kicked it just rammed its heel right up the spear. And after a while the ox would stop doing that. It wasn't a dumb ox.

And then there were occasions when a team of oxen would be attached to a wagon or a multiple plow. And they would hand on the front of the plow a long board stretching all the way across running right behind the heels of the oxen. It would be filled with spikes. And as they would kick they would just puncture their heels and soon they would cease kicking. This is how a young ox learned submission, the hard way.

Paul was a young ox. He was learning the hard way that you can't keep kicking against Jesus Christ without getting stuck. You know you can imagine that there wasn't a person on the earth more miserable than Paul at this time, trying to fight what he was supposed submit to. So Paul says, "I'm just walking along to Damascus there, and at midday the light shines and a voice says, 'Saul, Saul, why do you continue to fight this thing? Give up.' And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'" Now it doesn't say what happened at that point, but I can imagine that a buzz went through that crowd. Jesus? Alive? He's dead. The disciples stole his body. That was the testimony. Jesus talked to him? He's out of his mind. He's a fool. Paul simply in verse 15 brings down a sledgehammer blow on the whole scene. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." And so Paul shares his conversion.

Now watch beginning in verse 16 his commission. And here in this is the fullness of the transformation, now watch. Verse 16: "But rise, and stand upon thy feet," and by this time you know Paul was lying on the ground blinded, "Stand up for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of these things, which thou has seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee." The Lord said, "Get up Paul. I just made you a minister. You have been made a witness." And then he says in verse 17, "Delivering you from the people, from the Gentiles unto whom now I send you." The word I send, *apostello*, from which we get the word apostle. "Get up Paul, I just made you an apostle."

And you remember an apostle was someone who had to be appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ personally. Called of God to be an apostle involved a direct choice by our Lord Jesus Christ. And here in the case of Paul he is made an apostle by the Lord himself. When people say, "Are there apostles today?" The answer is, "No." Because Christ is not here to appoint them. There are people who are sent to preach, but not in terms of foundational apostles.

Now an apostle also had to be an eyewitness of the resurrection. In Acts 1 it says, "Wherefore of these men who have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to the same day he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." Judas was disqualified; they were trying to choose the next disciple. They said, "Whoever it is he must be a witness of the resurrection." A true apostle had to see the resurrected Christ. Notice back now in verse 16, "I make you a minister and a witness of these things, which you have," what? "Seen." He saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrected Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road in a brilliant glorious face brighter than the sun, and twice after that he says, "And of those things in which I will appear to you." He appeared again to him in the temple in the trance in Jerusalem, again to him in the jail cell right at Jerusalem and told him he was going to go to Rome. He saw the Lord Christ at least three times by the time we arrive right here in Chapter 25 of Acts. He fit the qualifications. He says, "I am calling you as an apostle, a minister, and a witness." As a minister concept as a servant, someone who serves. A

witness, someone who sees something, and who tells about it. And that's really all that Christian testimony has to be. It has to come out of the crucible of my own experience.

He says in verse 17, "Delivering thee from the people." That's a proper term really for the Jews. The people means the Jews and from the Gentiles or the pagans unto whom now I send thee." Now here you have the cycle saved out of the world to go back to the world. One of the things I have never understood in church history in connection with the Roman Catholic Church has been the cloistering of individuals, the monastic societies.

Now whether they be convents, closed convents for nuns, or whether they be monks placed way off in monasteries, ministry to the Lord Jesus Christ involves ministry to people. And to say that you go off in absolute isolation to serve the Lord is a contradiction in terms. To offer a cup of cold water to a stranger is to minister to Christ, isn't it? We do it in his name we do it unto Me, he said. Serving people is serving Him and we were saved out of the world not to be left out of the world but to be sent back into the world. Now you look at your job that way when you go to work on Monday morning. You recognize yourself as having been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ sent to that community of people to expose them to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to transform them from darkness to light. You're a missionary, you're a sent one. And in many ways you touch the world to a greater degree than I do, and yet people think of me as a minister and yet my contacts in the world are more limited than yours are. You're an ambassador and committed unto you is the ministry of reconciliation. You're to get people into the right adjustment.

Now notice what he says his message was to be, and this is such a marvelous verse we could spend long time talking about just this, we won't though. Here's what I was to say. Here was the gospel to present to open their eyes. Notice in verse 18 and that really is the starting of the gospel. The first thing you have to do with unsaved people is open their eyes 'cause their eyes are blind. Israel's were blind. Jesus even said about them, "It's the case of the blind leading the blind, they're both going to fall into the ditch." You see, when the word of God comes along men all of a sudden see what they never saw before, and what they usually see is sin. I think the key to opening a man's eyes is to uncover the blindness of sin, to take off the scales so he can see his sin. The word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God opens men's eyes. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

And so when we open men's eyes we reveal to them the truth of salvation. He goes further than that. It's not just a matter of opening their eyes; it's a matter of changing their lives from turning them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God. Now what do you see in that? You see conversion, don't you? Transformation, change, new creation. You take them out of darkness and place them in light. You take them out of the power of Satan placing them in the power of God. A person without the Lord Jesus Christ lives in darkness. His mind is darkened. Ephesians tells us his mind is absolutely darkened and alienated. These words are very very powerful words.

Listen to this: Ephesians 4:18, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance in them because of the blindness of their heart, being past feeling of giving themselves over to lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness." What is he saying? Their understanding is darkened. They're alienated from the life of God. They're ignorant. They're blind. They're past feeling. They're given over to sin. They work uncleanness. Here's the blindness of sin. And we come along and our objective is to take the word of God and try to tear the scales of blindness and show them what's true.

You see you can't really truly evangelize unless you have some information, unless you have some truth to reveal. Open their eyes. The gospel then having opened their eyes to the truth is to transform them from darkness to light. You notice the absolute opposites? Salvation isn't giving you more light. There's this guy I hear on Sunday mornings. I don't know who he is and he comes on with about 15 minutes of dribble about just platitudes, just little dumb platitudes. And he's always saying we need more light, more light, and you say, you don't need more light, my friend, you need light, any light. It is not a case of more light, it is a case of light. The unsaved man is darkness. Everything he does is darkness. His understanding is dark. His will is dark. Everything is dark. He doesn't need more light he needs light. It is an absolute transformation from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His dear Son.

As Paul said it to the Colossians 1:12 and he calls it an inheritance of light. Boy you walk in the light and see things as they are, you see the truth of God, your path is clear, you understand what God is doing, you understand what God is saying, that happens in a miraculous moment. The opposite of darkness. Then he says the gospel not only transforms men from darkness to light but from the power of Satan to the power of God. Every man in the world is under the power of Satan or the power of God. Do you know that? There's no such thing as a free man. You just choose who your master will be. It's either Satan or God. And you know people think, "I'm free to do my own thing, go my own way, do what I want to do." It isn't true. In Ephesians 2 it says, "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins, you who walked according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worked in the children of disobedience. Anybody disobedient to the gospel, any human being in the world other than a Christian is guided by the spirit that works in him. That spirit is the prince of the power of the air, Satan. Salvation means that you transfer that man from Satan's power to God's power. That's total transformation. He doesn't need more of God. He doesn't need more information. He needs a total rebirth.

And then in addition he says my message was this: to tell that they may receive forgiveness of sins." Boy I imagine ol' Bernice was wiggling around at that point. I imagine Agrippa was going like this. Paul was a penetrating person. I can't be Paul, but maybe it doesn't come across like he said it, but when he said that they may receive forgiveness of sins, I can see a long stare and a long pause because Agrippa and Bernice knew enough to know that what they did was sin. They knew it not

only because they knew the Scriptures, the Old Testament, but they knew it because they knew their conscience. And in a sense Paul was saying, "Forgiveness is available, Agrippa. Whatever you and Bernice have done, whatever you are, that's our message." I'm telling you that's an exciting message to be able to give the world, isn't it? To be able to say to somebody who is a Christian, "My little children He has forgiven you all your trespasses for His name's sake." Oh what a blessed thought.

That's what Paul meant when he said, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impugn iniquity. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord charges no sin." You say, "But surely even if you're a Christian God will lay some sin at your feet." Not at all. "Who shall lay any charge to God's elect? It is God that justifies. Shall Christ? Nay. Shall Christ accuse the one He died to save? No. Shall Christ accuse you of the sin He died and bore? No. There's no accusation against you. Forgiveness is full and free and complete. In addition to the moment transformation from darkness to light, power to Satan to God, forgiveness of sin, there's the future. He gives you an inheritance among them who are sanctified. The word sanctified means holy. You know another marvelous thing about becoming a Christian is the future promise of an inheritance undefiled and reserved for us. Isn't that marvelous? An inheritance with God.

And then he gives the way you can attain it. Look at the end of verse 18. It's all yours Agrippa by what? faith that is in Me. Jesus said to Paul that day, Paul you go and you preach "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin and inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith that is in Me." You tell them that if they believe in Me it is all theirs. And so Paul quotes to Agrippa the words of Jesus, the words of our Lord as they were given to him in Damascus. There's only one way to know those things and that's by faith. The simple gospel of Jesus Christ that we're called on to preach is the gospel of Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." So he says, "Agrippa, look what happened to me. I was a Jew of all the Jews. I was zealous not only for Judaism, but I was killing Christians and trying to get them to blaspheme. One day I was walking on the way to the Damascus road and the light shone in the middle of the day brighter than the sun itself. It smashed me down and I heard a voice and it said, 'Why don't you quit fighting me, Paul?' And I said, 'Who are you Lord?' And I heard it was Jesus.

And then this Jesus said, 'Arise for I have made you a minister and a witness,' and then He commissioned me to preach and He told me what I was to say." And then verse 19, "Where upon O king Agrippa I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." Agrippa, how could I disobey a voice from heaven? How could I disobey? So we see the commencement of Paul's testimony.

Going back to the thought we had at the very beginning Paul said I am a minister of reconciliation. I obey the Lord in that. Then he said to you, listen, "We are all ambassadors for Christ. We are to beg men to be reconciled to God." It has been committed unto us the word of reconciliation and the

ministry of recon illation and I ask you will you be disobedient? Paul says, "I will not be." I pray that you and I will not be disobedient, but that we too will be faithful ministers of right adjustment. The goal and objective of our lives as it touches the life of an unsaved person would be to convert them to Jesus Christ.

Father thank you this morning for giving us the time to share together in the word and thank you for the joy we know just because we touch Thee when we touch this book. Our hearts are open to this book, they're open to Thee. How blessed we are, how rich we feel, but Father in all that we feel and all that we sense of what is ours in Christ, help us to sense great obligation. Thank you for the faithful ones in this congregation who are so zealous and so eager and so compassionate in sharing the gospel. And thank you for the many who sit in this auditorium this morning because somebody sitting near them cared and told them of Christ. Thank you for others Father now who are being witnessed to and who are contemplating our Lord Christ. Lord, challenge us with the ministry of reconciliation. Paul said I am not disobedient. May we say it as well. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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