

PAUL'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Acts ch 26, esp. vs. 19-29

When God sent Ananias to lead Saul of Tarsus to Christ He had said, "he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

Now Paul was doing just that.

He was giving his testimony of the saving power of Jesus Christ to a king, queen, governor, royal court, and pagan and gentile assembly.

I. PAUL'S INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS TO AGRIPPA, vs 1-2.

A. It was very courteous, recognizing Agrippa's knowledge, and requesting that he should hear him in patience.

B. Paul probably gave a genuine sigh of relief that he was to be heard by one who would at least be able technically to follow his argument.

C. Festus knew that Agrippa had the most intimate knowledge of the Jewish faith and belief and practice, so he naturally proposed to discuss Paul's case with him.

D. As Paul looked into the face of Agrippa, and knew him to be a magnificent man in many respects, he must have felt within himself:

"O, that this man could only see these things as I have seen them through the light of the resurrection of the Lord."

E. He must have had a strong desire to lead Agrippa to Christ.

II. PAUL'S TESTIMONY IN HIS OWN DEFENSE

A. It was the testimony of a changed man.

One of the extraordinary things about the great characters in the NT story is that they were never afraid to confess what once they had been.

Here in the presence of the king, Paul frankly and freely confesses that there was a day when he had tried to eliminate the name of Christ and to blast the Christians out of existence.

Dr. William Barclay tells the story of a famous evangelist and preacher called Brownlow North.

He too was a changed man and in his early days he had lived a life that was anything but Christian.

Once, in Aberdeen, he received a letter, just before he was to enter the pulpit to preach in a church.

This letter informed him that its writer had evidence of some disgraceful thing which Brownlow North had done before he became a Christian;

and it went on to say that the writer was going to interrupt the service and tell the whole congregation of that sin if North preached.

Brownlow North took the letter into the pulpit; he read it to the congregation; he told of the thing that once he had done; and then he told them that the charge was absolutely true, but that Christ had changed him and that Christ could do the same for them.

He used the very evidence of his shame to turn it to the glory of Christ.

B. It was a defence of "the Way" to a logical mind.

1. It was with the purpose to convince this man, to capture the logical assent of an acute mind.

2. He began by asking Agrippa to remember his past life from his youth up, among his own nation and at Jerusalem known to all the Jews.

3. Continuing, he said "After the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."

4. He described to Agrippa his first contact with "the Way" of Jesus of Nazareth.

He was very antagonistic and strongly opposed.

5. Then he told the simple and central story of how the crisis came which changed everything in his life; how he was on the way to Damascus, persecuting even unto foreign cities those who named His name; how a light had shone about him brighter than the sun, and a voice had spoken; it was the voice of Jesus tenderly calling him home to inner peace and calling him to be a pioneer messenger to all the Gentiles.

6. Paul declared that his testimony was in harmony with the foretelling of prophets, and the teaching of Moses, that the Messiah must suffer; and that out of the resurrection light, had come the explanation of the ancient prophets of the OT.

Paul thus argued before Agrippa that his Christianity was the logical and necessary sequel to his past, because that which was the central hope of Judaism had been fulfilled in One Who demonstrated His Messiahship by His actual resurrection from among the dead. He had indeed met the Jesus they had murdered, alive; He could do no other than follow His call.

C. But this address of Paul was not merely a defense of "the Way" for the logical mind; it was the declaration of "the Way" for the enquiring spirit.

It was not only a mental movement or argument; it was a spiritual movement intended to compel the will to yield obedience to the call and claims of Christ.

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1. The central fact creating the Gospel, according to Paul, was the risen, living, acting Jesus; and the central fact of this gospel is the suffering Messiah of Moses and the prophets, seen in the light of the resurrection.

Not the Cross apart from resurrection, but the Cross, interpreted by the res., was the gospel which Paul preached.

2. Vs. 17 & 18 give us a perfect summary of what Christ does for men. (Barclay)

a. He opens their eyes.

b. He turns them from darkness to the light.

c. He transfers him from the power of Satan to the power of God.

d. He gives him forgiveness of sins and a share with the sanctified.

3. Vs 20 gives a vivid summary of the substance of the message which Paul preached (Barclay)

a. He called on men to repent-

change their minds

This involves sorrow.

It involves a new resolve, a determination that by the grace of God we will be changed;

it is a break with the past and a dedication to God.

b. He called on men to turn to God.

c. He called on men to do deeds to match their repentance.

III. PAUL'S CLOSING APPEAL TO AGRIPPA

A. Followed the interruption to his address by Festus

1. Festus had listened to the past history of this man, to the strange things he had said about visions and revelations and voices and resurrection, and now he could endure it no longer. He felt that Paul's great learning had driven him mad.

2. But what was sheer madness to the governor's way of thinking was truth and sober thinking to Paul's.

B. Paul appealed directly to Agrippa:

"You believe the prophets, don't you,
your Majesty?"

1. The events which fulfilled the ancient prophecies were well known & public;
2. Anyone who believed the prophets and compared their predictions with the historical facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth must acknowledge the truth of Christianity.
3. Agrippa could have supplied corroborating testimony and assure Festus that Paul's arguments were sane and well founded, and that the gospel which he preached contained "nothing but what the prophets and Moses said should come." The logic of the situation was so plain to the apostle that he could hardly imagine that such an expert in the Jewish religion would not accept the obvious conclusion.

C. But Agrippa's reaction and response was not at all what Paul had hoped for.

1. The king was embarrassed by Paul's appeal.
2. He did not want even to appear to lend support to Paul's case because it might involve his personal commitment to the Christian cause.
3. It is difficult to know exactly what Agrippa said or just what he meant.
It has been translated in many different ways:
 - a. Almost thou persuadest me to be a Xtn.
 - b. With very little wouldest thou persuade me to be a Xtn.
 - c. You are very easily persuading yourself that I am going to be a Christian.
 - d. A very little more, and you would make me a Xtn.
 - e. With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Xtn.
 - f. In short, you are trying to make me play the Xtn.

g. You surely think that you are not going to take long to persuade me to be a Xtn.

h. In a short time you think to make me a Christian!

i. Much more of this, and you will be making me a Christian!

j. You think it will not take much to win me over and make a Xtn of me.

k. At this rate, it won't be long before you believe you have made a Xtn of me!

4. The one thing certain is that for the moment he put aside the conviction and appeal, and ended the audience, and chatted with Festus, and Bernice, and rose up and left.

5. The last impression is not of Agrippa but of Paul.

Here we have one of the greatest pictures in all his life.

He said, "I could pray that, whether it takes short of long, not only you but also all who are listening to me today were such as I am, apart from these chains."

Agrippa was in purple;
Bernice was decked with her jewels;
Festus was robed in scarlet.
Paul was a prisoner in chains, in bonds, to be sent to Rome, perhaps to death.

Yet he is the dominating person in the scene. Notice his tenderness and compassion. He would give them his soul's liberty, peace, & salvation, but not his bodily bonds or burdens. That is the spirit of Christ.

The sincerity that is willing to die to deliver, but will not impose a chain, is genuine Christianity.

The person with this spirit in him has a power of personality & character which raises him head and shoulders above all others in any crowd.