

Paul's Testimony and Yours!

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Acts 26 is our reading for this morning. Very nonchalantly look around you and if there's anybody without a Bible or a Psalter or an outline, make sure they get one, okay? This chapter is, of course, Paul's third and last record, his second testimony to God's work in his life and God's work for all and how it applied to Paul. It is the most complete and full description and testimony of Paul to God's saving work in his life so it is a really precious passage. Acts 26, hear God's word.

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.

4 So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. 6 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

9 So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

12 While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

19 So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 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. 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."

24 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." 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. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." 28 Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." 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."

30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, 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."

Let us pray.

Father, we pray again in the sense of our great weakness that we are not able to take these things to heart except your Holy Spirit empower these words, except you open our minds to understand these things and open our hearts to believe them and empower our wills to do them and so we pray that you would work by your Spirit, through your word, to give, sustain, increase faith and bring through it the deeds appropriate to repentance. Help us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So this is the third record of Paul's conversion. We have the original narrative of the event in chapter 9; we have Paul's testimony to the Jews in chapter 22; and his testimony to the Gentiles now in chapter 26. So you have event, testimony to the Jews, testimony to the Gentiles and these three things wrap it up as a very significant thing. Whenever you see things repeated in the Scriptures, it is drawing your attention to it and when it is said three times, it is legally binding because the Scripture rule is that on the basis of two or three witnesses every fact is established and Luke, in Acts, is establishing the importance and the significance of the fact of Paul's conversion; that this has significance not just for Paul, but for us, and his experience and his relating of it in various contexts is instructive to us in how to do that.

The testimony that he's giving is a testimony to hope. He says this very often. Verse 6, "I am on trial for the hope of the promise made to our fathers." And he said this in previous chapters and will say it again at the end of this book. And hope, by biblical definition, is confident expectation based on the certain promises of God. It's not wishful thinking. It's not uncertain. It is certainty about something that has not yet happened because God has promised and certified it to us and the whole reason that Paul has any expectation of anything good is that Jesus was raised from the dead. It's not just an event in the past, it is an event that begins something in the present and the future. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, there will be a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness lives. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, Paul was raised from the dead from his raging against God to his raging against the devil. Jesus was raised from the dead and that gives Paul and everyone who believes in Christ hope for the present and the future and that's the whole deal.

What I'm working on here is the conclusion that Paul sets for us in an approved example of how to give testimony to the work of God. You'll see and remember very well 1 Peter 3:15 and 16, "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you." That's what we are to do and that's what Paul has done and therefore Paul gives an example of how "to give an account for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and reverence, having a good conscience." Paul has been protesting his innocence. His innocence has been recognized by Felix and now by Festus and then by Agrippa. Three witnesses, he is innocent and that's with a good conscience. "I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience to this day," in his testimony before the Jews in chapter 22. So with these similarities in great detail, chapter 26 does give us a legitimate, approved example of Paul and how we are to imitate him in this. Then, of course, Paul's own example is following

Christ in his good confession before Pilate testifying to these same things. So follow this model for a faithful testimony.

The first thing is, looking at verse 20, if you were going to call people to repent and turn to God from their sins to his righteousness for in deeds appropriate to repentance, if you're going to call other people to do that, you've got to do that first. You can't just say, "Go that way." You have to say, "Come with me in this way." Paul says, "Follow me as I follow Christ," and that's our testimony, it must be the same. "Follow me as I follow Christ. Turn away from sin with me. Turn to Christ's righteousness with me. Perform deeds appropriate for repentance with me." We can't model Paul unless we are an example of repentance, faith and faithfulness. Again, in 1 Peter, "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense and keep a good conscience." The only way to have a good conscience is to turn away from sin and be cleansed and to walk in Christ's righteousness and live. You must do it first if you will call others to these things.

The second thing is we must be wise and courageous. You think of Paul in all these situations, how intimidating would this be? You're in chains; your innocence has already been recognized multiple times; you've been in jail already for a couple of years and you're still in jail and you're still being paraded out before various people to say again what you've said a hundred times before. And these are people who have your life and death in their hands. The Jews couldn't legitimately put you to death, they had to go to the Romans to get them to do that for you as they did with Christ. So this is extremely intimidating and we must be, as Moses constantly said and throughout the Old Testament, "Be strong and courageous!" Do not be intimidated but trust in God to give you what you need to do what he has called you to do.

But Paul didn't do this as we might be inclined to think by his natural boldness. He seems to be bold all the time and so it seems to come easy for him, but in Ephesians 6:20 and he is in prison in Rome at this point, "the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak, opening my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, the hope of the resurrection." Paul didn't do this naturally. He had to pray for it. He had to ask for it. It didn't come easy for him and so he sets us an example in that regard as well, that in all the situations, we are given the opportunity to testify for the hope that is in us. We need to pray for wisdom, to know what to say and what not to say, and for courage to open our mouths and subject ourselves to some very difficult responses sometimes.

The third thing to take to heart in this example is that we are to respect people. When Paul spoke to the Sanhedrin, when he spoke to Felix, when he speaks now to Agrippa and Festus, he always begins not just with the rhetorical, this is part of the rhetorical outline that is traditional, but he didn't skip over it. He didn't think, "Listen, I'm an apostle, you're just a king. I don't have to show you any respect. You're an unbelieving," well, not Agrippa but Festus, "You're an unbelieving pagan. I don't have to show you any respect. You need to show me respect. You need to listen to me. You need to hear what I have to say because you're just a lowly worm and I know what you need and I'm going to tell

you what you need and you're going to listen to it." It's a bad idea to do that when you're in chains but in any situation, if you're going to present the Gospel to someone, you need to show them respect. They are human beings made in the image of God. Nine times out of 10, they will be smarter than you, okay? Nine times out of 10, they will be more gifted than you in some respect and you need to acknowledge their giftedness, their place. God put Festus in this place. God put Agrippa in this place and he is sitting on a throne by God's appointment and by showing him respect, you're showing God respect. And to everyone that you speak to, by showing them respect, you're showing God respect. And one of the most destructive things about Christian evangelism and witnessing is that we come to people acting as if we know it all; as if we have it all together; as if we have it figured out; as if we don't have any sin or temptation in our lives; and as if we have realized the fullness of Christ's righteousness in our own experience. Get over yourself.

One of the most effective means, and it isn't just a technique, it is seated in reality, is that when you call someone else to repent, confess your sins against them. Very often you'll be in a situation where you were admonishing someone because they've turned aside to a foolish or wicked way, but if you've known them for any time at all, you don't need a lot of time to sin against someone, so if you've known them for any time at all, think, "What way in which have I sinned against this person?" and show them how to confess sin and humble yourself and repent so that they will follow your example. That also is another way of showing people respect. They before God deserve your repentance, confession of sin, and asking them for forgiveness. It's not easy to do but there are plenty of opportunities because we do sin against people.

Show people respect. This, again, is another overlap with 1 Peter 3, "always be ready to make a defense for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." That's how Paul dealt with Felix, the Sanhedrin and Festus and Agrippa, and that's how we must deal with people. We need to explain why we expect anything good in the future, but we need to do it with respect and gentleness and humility. Just a reminder that very shortly before this passage in 1 Peter 3, we have 1 Peter 2, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him." So that is a particular example that Paul is giving us.

Fourthly, speak through the mind to the heart. In evangelism, we are reasoning with people and that is necessary and right, but speaking to their mind and "repentance" is "metanoia" which is "after mind." You thought this way before and now you think this way after so you are trying to change people's minds about what is true and false, but that is a means to an end. You are trying to change their minds so that by that means their hearts will be changed and their affections will be transferred from sin to righteousness, from Satan to God.

So it is absolutely necessary that we reason with people. In verse 25, "I utter words of sober truth," and literally you'll see it in your New American Standard margin, "truth and rationality." Truth, the thing itself and the reasoning with the cognitive part of your brain, not some subconscious but the active thinking that using truth and bringing it to the mind. A noetic counseling means to bring the truth to the mind. It is to bring truth and reason

with people to help them understand it and that is good, right and necessary. Paul would go into the synagogues and the reference I've made in Acts 17. He would go into the synagogue and reason with the people, dialoguing. He would set up propositions and people would respond to them and he would respond to them. Back and forth. He would proclaim the Gospel and then try to work it into their minds to instruct them. And then he went to the marketplace and he did the same thing, but as we've considered before, you work differently with Jews in terms of special revelation, and with Gentiles in terms of general revelation, but in both cases you reason with them. "Come let us reason together," is the idea.

But all of this is for the purpose of reaching the heart. Repentance is a change of mind, but it is also a change of heart and so, for example, in Isaiah 40, God says to Isaiah, "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem. Tell her that her warfare has ended." And so, yes, we're addressing them like we're reasoning but it's a means. We are not merely trying to get people to concede to our arguments and to say to us, "Yes, you are right," and then go off on their own way still living the way they did. We're looking through the mind to the heart. Ruth says to Boaz, "You have spoken to the heart of your maidservant." Our objective is not merely to instruct the mind or to turn the mind, but to turn the heart. We can't do that but God can use us to do that, and that's what we're looking for. Ephesians 4:15, "speaking the truth in love." "Speaking the truth" is addressing the mind. "Speaking the truth in love" is addressing the heart. And if we don't reach the affections of people, nothing good will happen. Probably most of you are familiar with Jonathan Edwards in "Religious Affections," it is the will, it is the heart. The mind is the entrance but it is not the destination.

Item E.: tell your story. Every time that Paul was asked to explain himself, he didn't merely articulate his doctrine. He didn't merely say, "I believe in the Bible. I believe this, that and the other thing." He told about his own experience of those things. And we'll be singing in a little while from Psalm 66:16, "Come and hear, all who fear God, And I will tell of what He has done for my soul." That's how you reach the heart, telling your story, telling what God has done for you. That is very compelling to people, but telling people simply abstract propositions or distant doctrines by themselves, doesn't touch the heart.

Why do we have movies? Why don't people just sell one sheet of the storyline with an outline? This happens and then this happens and this happens and that happens. It gives you the whole thing and you know who the players are and what the events are, but it doesn't touch your heart. No outline is going to make you cry. No outline is going to make you laugh. But when someone tells the story with appropriate music in the background, that has pop and it addresses your mind. You're thinking. You're hearing. You're reasoning. You're following along. But especially with the music, it just hits your heart and it can turn you from weeping one moment to laughing the next and that is the beauty and the skill and the power of story.

It's really amusing if you see these situations where you have the same video passage and you have different music attached to it. You know, someone is walking through a garden and you have happy music, it's just great. And then you have somebody walking through

the garden and it's the same picture and you have dun, dun, dun, dun, and you know something bad is going to happen. Somebody is going to come out of the frame and just wipe them out and it's all in the music. It's all in the music and telling the facts of the Gospel from your experience of it is the music to the story and that's what touches people's hearts. I am pandering to theater people, that's okay. You have to address things to your audience, right? But it's true. It's true. That's why we do it. Just one more thing, at the end of movies, sit through the credits and see how many people produce these things. I watch movies and I think, "Man, I wish my sermons were like that." Well, if I had 3,000 people for three years maybe I could preach like that, and a budget of three billion dollars. It's incredible, but why? Because it's reaching the heart. So in evangelism, it's easy to come up with the outline, but telling the story requires a great deal of effort and grace and skill. So tell your story.

Another great passage in this regard is Luke 8:39, Jesus says to the man out of whom demons were cast, "'Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him." We in the Reformed churches don't tell our stories enough. We just don't. We are rightly compelled and consumed with telling the accomplishment of redemption which is good and necessary, but we don't spend enough time and energy on the application of redemption in our own experience and that's what Paul does. Paul could've said, "Jesus lived, was tempted, died a perfect death, was buried for three days, raised on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God ruling over all things for the sake of the church." Boom! There it is. That is the reason for the hope that is in him, but that isn't how he did it. Paul said, "This is what God has done for my soul. This is how Jesus raised me from the dead. This is how Jesus gave me life in his righteousness. This is how Jesus rules me from the right hand of God." And that has pop.

But, item F, coming back to our Reformed roots, hastening to that: tell your story, but your story is meaningless unless it is grounded in God's story. You can spend all day telling your story about where you were born, how you grew up, sports, music, blah, blah, blah, blah and you never get to, "God raised me from the dead. God turned me from my sin. I am not the person I was or would have been except God intervened in my life and completely changed me." And sooner or later in telling our story, we have to show how it is grounded in God's story and that's what Paul does. He weaves in the midst of his story the story of the resurrection.

Verse 8, "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?" He hits that early and then he hits it again late. Verse 22, "I stand testifying to nothing other than what the prophets and Moses," the Old Testament, "said was going to take place, that the Christ, the Messiah that is constantly testified to the seed of the woman and so forth, was to suffer by reason of the resurrection. He would be the first to proclaim light and life to the Jews and Gentiles." That is God's story and Paul is telling how God's story, what God accomplished, is applied in his experience and that's how we testify. We tell God's story and how it has manifested in our story. This is what Paul has done wherever he has gone.

A wonderful example of this and we've gone over this frequently throughout the years but let me just go through it very quickly. A great example of this is in Colossians where Paul takes the story of God and shows how it is made into our story. So he starts in Colossians 1:13, "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son," which is really almost a literal application of Acts 26:18, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." So we're given the same basic story. So this is what God has done: Christ died to sin, we died to sin with him. Christ was raised to life, we are raised to life with him. That's how our story is part of his story.

Then in chapter 2 he develops it, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith." That's the thing. Our story is being united to Christ's story by the gift of faith. God's story is: Jesus died for sin. Our story is: by faith in Christ we died to sin. God's story is: Jesus was raised from the dead because of his righteousness. Our story is: we are raised from the dead through faith in Christ in his righteousness. Do you see the importance of the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is God's story: the bread and the juice. And our story is: eating the bread, drinking the juice. And in the Lord's Supper, in this simple ordinance, we are instructed in how God's story is made our story and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to testify to that.

In 2:20, "If you have died with Christ," in Colossians 3:1, "If you have been raised with Christ." Christ accomplished it, God's story; the Holy Spirit applies it to us, our story and that's what we tell. It is not one or the other. It is not just our story without reference to Christ, nor is it Christ's accomplishment without reference to our experience. It is both and simply because in some other traditions people tell their story without sufficient reference to Christ doesn't mean that we should tell Christ's story without sufficient reference to our experience.

In chapter 3, "you have laid aside the old self," the cross, "you have put on the new self," resurrection." 3:5, "put to death a member of your earthly body," dying with Christ. Verse 12, "put on the heart of compassion," being raised with Christ. The whole letter of Colossians is oriented around how the story of God is made our story. It instructs us how to testify to these things.

The importance of this is also indicated in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, "For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." God's story made our story.

Item G.: show your credentials. Paul was at great pains in his various testimony that he was given a heavenly vision and a heavenly commission. He wasn't doing this on his own authority, he was called by God, he was ordained by Christ and sent to preach to the Jews and Gentiles. You may say, "I haven't had a heavenly vision. Nobody has told me, an angel from heaven saying, 'Go preach the Gospel.'" If you had that experience I'd love to hear about it but probably not. But what you do have is your baptism. Christ's christening, his ordination, was not with oil, was not with the laying on of hands. The

turning point from Christ, if you will, as a private citizen to the public Messiah was his baptism. After his baptism he went into the wilderness and he began his Messianic ministry. He had this Holy Spirit on him as an individual growing up, but at his baptism, he was empowered by the Holy Spirit to undertake his Messianic work and it is instructive to us that your commission is in your baptism. If you are baptized, you are ordained to testify to God's story and your story and you are under orders, you are ordained as ambassadors to Christ to call people to repentance and faith and deeds appropriate to repentance.

You have credentials and your credentials are your baptism and that is your privilege and your authority and your power and your responsibility. If you are baptized, you are not merely responsible to turn from sin to righteousness, you are responsible to tell other people about it. So if someone says to you, "What right do you have to tell me about Jesus?" You say, "Well, I've been baptized." You don't get a badge or anything, but that's it. That's it. You've been baptized. You've been deputized in your baptism.

Item H.: call to repentance, faith and faithfulness. Another problem we have as Reformed people is that we tell the story, we tell God's story, we tell our story, and we leave it there. We just leave people to go about their business but that's not what Paul does. In verse 20 he says, kept declaring that people should repent, turn to God and perform deeds appropriate to repentance. There was a call to repentance. We don't just tell people about repentance and tell people about how God has brought repentance into our life, we call them in the name of Jesus to turn from their sin to righteousness.

Verse 27, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?" Now, there's an in-your-face statement. Not disrespectful but Paul calls Agrippa to believe in Jesus and to see and confess that everything that the Old Testament said the Messiah would be, Jesus is. And everything the Old Testament said the Messiah would do, Jesus has done. And to say, "Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world." He's calling him to that.

Jesus speaks to Mary about the resurrection and then he says, "Do you believe this?" And in our talking with people, we need to call them to repentance. Not necessarily sign the back of a tract but to call them to repentance and when they repent, sponsor them for baptism. Don't just leave people hanging. Call them in the name of Jesus to repent and believe in the Gospel. And as Reformed people, we don't do that. We just inform people and leave them to their own devices. You don't stand on the shore with a life preserver and say, "This is a life preserver. If you put this on, it will save your life," and then leave it in the boat. You throw it to them and say, "Grab on to this."

Do you believe this? Why or why not? What part of it don't you believe and why don't you believe it? Call people and in business language, close the deal. And even in old Puritan language it would be called closing with Christ. And we need to be gracious to people and help them close with Christ and call them to that.

Item I.: pray and watch for conversions. Verse 18, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." This is what Christ

promises to do through Paul and he looked for it and in verse 29 he prayed for it, "I wish to God." He is praying. That's a prayer. He is praying that God will use his testimony to save many. We don't know, but it's likely that he did.

So you have the wonderful example of Lydia. Paul is speaking to Lydia and God opened her heart to respond to the Gospel. Jesus is speaking to the men on the road to Emmaus and his disciples, he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. That's what we're looking for. We are given a job to do, we have means to employ, but what we're looking for is for God to act.

It's the Spirit who gives life. God has created out of nothing and so it's not surprising he gives life to the dead and it's really, verse 8, "Why is it incredible to you people that God raises the dead? Why are you surprised by that?" But what we are doing in evangelism is speaking to the dead. That's a great theme for Halloween. You have that movie, "I see dead people." We don't do that, hopefully, but what we do in evangelism is that we talk to dead people. Now, I talk to myself all the time here because there's nobody else to talk to. I come in here and talk to the Lord but mostly I'm talking to myself. We don't do that, but we do talk to dead people. What in the world is that about? Go into a cemetery and just talk to people? You might be carted away. But what we are doing is talking to dead people and Paul is talking to dead people, dead in sin. Why? Because God told him to do it. Why? Because God uses talking to dead people to make them alive. In evangelism, what we're doing is saying, "Lazarus, come forth! Bob, come forth! Linda, come forth!" and God blesses that word of telling God's story as he is manifested in our story to give life to the dead.

Remember Ezekiel and the Spirit says to Ezekiel, "Speak to these dry bones." Dead. They're dust in a dusty land and Ezekiel basically says, "Okay." And he speaks to the bones and the bones come together and sinew comes around them. That's what we're looking for in evangelism. That was all about God bringing a dead nation out of exile back to the Promised Land, but it certainly applies to evangelism.

Yes, you're speaking to dead people, but God uses that to give them life. Faith comes through hearing. Don't despair. Do this work with great anticipation. Also be prepared for rejection. That also will happen as it happened here. Festus had no clue what Paul was talking about. This is all foolishness to the Greeks. They don't see it. They're blind and they're deaf. It's like taking a blind person to an art gallery or a deaf person to a symphony. It makes no sense at all. They don't hear anything. But in God's ways, taking the blind person to the art gallery is the occasion for which they will see and taking the deaf person to a symphony is the circumstances in which they will hear. It is the means to that end and we shouldn't be surprised when we are rejected and we shouldn't be surprised when God works.

So, lastly, hope in God for his powerful intervention. Paul's conversion gives us such hope. Saul, hateful, arrogant, persecutor of the church, and God saved him. Now, when Paul was persecuting, his conversion seemed impossible, but after he was converted, it seems inevitable. "Of course he was converted." Well, no, no, no, not of course he was

converted, it's astounding that he was converted and the Christians couldn't believe it and had to be persuaded.

So you think of your family members, your kids, anybody that you desperately love and long to see converted, on this side of it, it's impossible and it is impossible, but nothing is impossible with God. Many of you know the story of Rosaria Butterfield, a lesbian professor of women's studies at Syracuse University, butch cut, driving a truck, the whole thing, flannel shirt, everything, and God saved her. And she speaks about the train wreck of her conversion. God ruined her life as she knew it. She was put to death and raised in life. If God converted Saul, if God converted Rosaria, and oh, by the way, if God converted me, last but not least, if God converted you, he can save anybody so don't despair. Nothing is impossible with God.

Remember the prayer of the Canaanite woman, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Save my daughter." Make that your prayer. Maybe the people that you're concerned about don't pray. You pray for them. "Have mercy on me." God gives us this instruction that we plead our relationship that God has given us and we leverage that for the salvation of others and God invites us to do that. "Have mercy on me, save my kids. Have mercy on me, save my neighbor," and pray that prayer with hope and expectation of the goodness of God because he saved you. There is no one that he cannot save.

So evangelize with great expectation, after all, why is it considered incredible among you people that God raises the dead? Hear that. Hear that spoken to you. Kit, why does it seem incredible to you that God will save your daughters? I am duly admonished and happy to be so. God is faithful and powerful and nothing is impossible with him. So tell how God worked out his story in your life. Tell how God who put his own Son to death for the forgiveness of sins, put you to death in Christ and broke the power of sin over your life. Tell how God who raised Jesus from the dead raised you from the dead in Jesus and established you in Christ's righteousness. Tell how God has worked out his story in your life so that others would hear it and be saved.

Let us pray.

Father, these are very familiar things but we so much need to be reminded and especially encouraged in them and so we pray, Lord, that as convicted and convinced as we are of your story, that we would not neglect to tell it as it is lived in our story so that people would feel the pop and hear the music and feel the truth of the Gospel in their own souls as they hear it and see it in our lives and testimony. And Lord, please use it to bring many people to faith, especially those whom we love so deeply. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. THREE WITNESSES** (9:1-22; 22:3-16; 26:9-18; see Dt.17:6; 19:15; Mt.18:16)
- B. A TESTIMONY TO HOPE** (26:6; see 23:6; 24:15; 28:20)
- C. AN APPROVED EXAMPLE** (26:1f with 1Pt.3:15,16)

II. A MODEL FOR FAITHFUL TESTIMONY

- A. REPENT & BELIEVE** (20; 31,32 (9:1f); see 2:38; 17:30Mk.1:15; 1Pt.3:16; Col.3:5f&12f; 2Pt.3:18)
- B. BE WISE & COURAGEOUS** (1f; see 22:1f; chps.13-28!; Eph.6:20; Col.4:4)
- C. RESPECT PEOPLE** (2; 24:10f; 17:22f; see 1Pt.3:15b; 2:13f)
- D. SPEAK THROUGH THE MIND TO THE HEART** (1f,25; see 17:17a&b; 19:8,9; see Is.1:18; see Ruth 2:13; 2Sam.19:7; Is.40:2; Eph.4:15)
- E. TELL YOUR STORY** (4-23; 22:1f; Phil.3:1f; 1Tm.1:12f; see Ps.66:16)
- F. TELL GOD'S STORY** (6-8; 18,20-23; see 2:11,22-36; 17:31; 24:15,21; 25:19; see Gen.3:15; Is.53; 2Cor.5:21; Col.1:13; 2:12; 2:20&3:1; 3:9&10; 5f&12f; 1Th.1:9,10; see Ps.96:3)
- G. SHOW YOUR CREDENTIALS** (13f; 19,20(1:8); see Mt.28:18f; 2Cor.5:20,21)
- H. CALL TO REPENTANCE, FAITH & FAITHFULNESS** (20,27; see Jn.11:26; Eph.2:1-10)
- I. PRAY & WATCH FOR CONVERSIONS** (18,29; see 16:14; Jn.6:63; Lk.24:45; Rom.4:17; 10:17(Eph.2:1f); see Ezk.37:1f)
- J. BE PREPARED FOR REJECTION ALSO** (23,24; 28(24:25); see 17:31f; 1Cor.1:18f)
- K. HOPE IN GOD FOR HIS POWERFUL INTERVENTION TO SAVE** (9f, 14; see Lk.1:37; Rom.4:17; Mt.8:2f; 11:14f; 15:22f; Lk.18:1f)

III. CONCLUSION: TELL HOW GOD WORKED OUT HIS STORY IN YOUR LIFE

(6-8,23 in 18,20; 1Pt3:13-16 /Col.1:13; 2:12; 2:20&3:1; 3:9&10; 5f&12f /2Cor.5:20,21; 1Cor.11:24,25 /Ps.66:16; 96:3)

Discussion question:
*Brethren, what shall **WE do**? (see Acts 2:37f)*