

Real Christianity

Acts 26:11-18

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-16-2009

Introduction

I'm going to start with a story by a sociologist who is not an orthodox evangelical (in fact he drives me crazy sometimes). I've purposely never quoted him in the past, but I thought I would do so today. And it's about a group of people who are not savory. And even his method of evangelism may seem a little bit strange. But his unorthodox methods of evangelism are a whole lot better than perfect methods of not evangelizing. The author is Tony Campolo, and the story he told was about a group of prostitutes that he met in a café.

It was actually accidental (from a human point of view). He was teaching at a Conference in Honolulu, and his first night there he had terrible insomnia. So he finally left the hotel in search of a place to eat. Around 3:30 am he stepped into a tiny coffee shop. There was a huge guy behind the counter who gruffly asked, "What do you want?" And Tony ended up eating a donut and sipping on coffee.

And right when he got started, 8 provocatively dressed prostitutes walked in talking rather boisterously. Tony said that things were crude enough that he was planning to make his escape when he heard a conversation that moved his heart to do something. One of the girls announced that it was her birthday tomorrow and that she would be 39 years old. Another prostitute made fun of her saying, "So what do you want from me? A birthday party? What do you want? Do you want me to get a cake, and sing happy birthday to you?" And she got defensive and said, "Come on, why do you have to be so mean? I'm just telling you, that's all. Why do you have to put me down? I was just telling you that it is my birthday. I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should I have a birthday party? I've never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?"

And Tony says that when he heard her say that she had never had a birthday party in her life, he realized her emptiness, and decided spontaneously to throw a party. He didn't tell them though. When the girls left the café, he asked if the girls came there every morning. The guy said, "Yeah." And when he asked Harry, the clerk, about the girl that was sitting

closest to him. Harry said, “Yeah, that’s Agnes. Yeah, she comes in here every night. Why do you want to know?”

Tony said, “Because I heard her say that tomorrow is her birthday. What do you say we do something special for her? What do you think about throwing a birthday party for her, right here in the diner?” And Harry responded enthusiastically, “That’s a great idea. I like it. That’s great. Agnes is one of those people who is really nice and kind. I don’t think anybody has ever done anything nice and kind for her.”

So Tony shows up the next morning at 2:30, decorates the place with streamers and brings a huge sign that says, “Happy Birthday, Agnes!” Word must have gotten out, because by 3:15 the next morning the room was wall-to-wall prostitutes, with Tony moderating. They all screamed, “Happy birthday, Agnes” when Agnes came in. And this woman who had never known anything like this stood in stunned silence. And when the birthday cake with all the candles on it was carried out, she started sobbing. Harry, the guy behind the counter, gruffly tried to get her to blow out the candles, and handed her a knife to cut it.

She kept staring at the cake, and finally asked if it was OK if they didn’t eat it right away. Harry said, “Sure, Agnes, that’s fine, ... keep the cake, take it home if you want.” “Oh, could I?” she asked. “I live just down the street a couple doors... I’ll be right back, honest.”

And everyone who had been expecting to have a piece of cake just stood there speechless as she carried the cake out the door like it was a Holy Grail – obviously very, very touched, but not too socially sensitive. Anyway, Tony wasn’t sure what to do, so he said, “What do you say we pray together?” And in his book he says,

“Looking back on it now, it seems more than a little strange that a sociologist from eastern PA would be leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner in Honolulu at 3:30 in the morning. But I prayed. I prayed for Agnes. I prayed for her salvation. I prayed that her life would be changed, and that God would be good to her. And when I finished, Harry leaned over, and with a trace of hostility in his voice he said, “Hey, you never told me you were a preacher. What kind of preacher are you anyway? What church do you belong to?” In one of those moments when just the right words came, I answered him quietly, “I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning.” Harry thought a moment, and then almost sneered as he answered, “No you don’t; there is no church like that. In fact,” he concluded, “if there was, I’d join it.”¹

¹ Illustration taken from Brett Blair, “Episode II: Birth of the Church.”

When I read that I thought, “I’m not sure that we are a church that would throw birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning.” And I asked myself, “Why not? Is it because we are too scared, or too busy, or don’t have the right contacts?” And if we wouldn’t throw birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 am, would we reach out to them in any way with the gospel? Jesus did. There was more than one former prostitute in his circle. Would Pharisees be able to make the accusation stick against *us* that that they made against *Jesus* – that he was “**a friend of tax collectors and sinners!**” (Matt 11:19). I suspect we would welcome a prostitute in here, but wouldn’t reach out. Let me tell you something – prostitutes don’t make a habit of walking into churches. If we wouldn’t reach out to them, would we reach out to people like Saul of Tarsus? He was a legalistic persecutor. We saw earlier in Acts that the church of Jerusalem didn’t want to talk to Saul even after he got converted. It took Barnabas to draw him in. People were scared of him. We tend to be scared of anything that is different. And I think it takes the grace of God to break us out of that comfort zone. If we had a half dozen bikers come in here with their leathers, would we show the love of Christ to them? I think we probably would. But then I asked myself, “Are we reaching out?”

We have done some door-to-door evangelism in our own neighborhood, and broken the ice by asking neighbors if they have any prayer requests that we could pray for. We’ve prayed for a lost dog, a couple people with cancer, the daughter of a Buddhist who is in trouble, a family who had their house up for sale and wanted us to pray that it would sell right away, and a few other prayer requests. God has actually answered some of those prayers. But I thought, what would our church look like if everyone started telling their friends and neighbors about Jesus or started praying for them and caring for them? Would we be ready to minister to huge influx of such people if God converted them like He converted Paul? I hope the answer is yes, but I think we ought to be casting ourselves on the Lord for grace to have the right words, the right attitudes, and the right divine contacts. In other words, we need to begin having an expectation that God loves to work in such ways and have a longing that we would be in a position to be used by Him in such ways. I want to be used by the Lord to love people with messed up lives.

We looked at verses 1-11 last week and saw that religion is not enough. Religion can evangelize, pray, and do all kinds of things, and still be empty. So we are not talking about doing more things. Most of us don’t work downtown and so it is unlikely that you will meet prostitutes, and

that's OK. We are talking about doing the things that we do with the power and presence of God. Today I want to see the nature of real Christianity from Paul's perspective. Christianity *can* be real, powerful, and transformational.

I. Real Christianity reaches sinners, even if they are self-righteous (v. 9-11)

In verses 9-11 we see that real Christianity reaches sinners, even if they are self-righteous. And self-righteousness is just another form of sin. If that's the case, it means that we shouldn't be looking down our nose at the self-righteous Saul's anymore than we would the down-and-outers.

Look at the kind of person that was reached by the Gospel.

Acts 26:9 “Indeed, I myself thought I must do [notice that he is very sincere in his sin – “I myself thought I *must* do”] **many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.**

Acts 26:10 **This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*.**

Acts 26:11 **And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.**

Paul was a great sinner who was reached by the Gospel of grace. He says that he was a blasphemer. Are there guys that blaspheme and cuss today that are uncomfortable to be around? Yes there are. And real Christianity reaches out to such people. Paul was hostile to Jesus. Are there people who are hostile to everything that Jesus stands for? Yes there are. Can we reach both Democrats and Republicans for Christ? Both Green Party and Libertarian Party members for Christ? Paul was a murderer. Julie can tell you about criminals that need to be reached at the jail. Can Christianity reach out to parents who have committed the murder of abortion? Yes it can. It must reach them.

One of the things that was so refreshing to Kathy and me at the Worldview Super Conference was how many transformed lives we met. A guy from Bulgaria who was taken out of communistic atheism into a passionate postmillennial Reconstructionism. He had a love for God and a passion is to see Bulgaria become a Christian nation. And he has already been used powerfully in that country.

We met Gary DeMar, a converted drunk. Someone took the time to witness to him in a bar, and his life was transformed, and he is being used in his ministry, American Vision, to seek to transform our nation and make it a

Christian nation. I wonder if the guy who took the time to go into that bar, knows what Gary has become?

There was Joel McDurmon, a guy covered with tattoos, a former rock and roll band member, who is director of research for American Vision and hard core into theology. His life was turned upside down.

If we look across the landscape of our own congregation we discover some people who have had pretty rough backgrounds. Each one of you are men and women whom God has reached by His sovereign grace and turned upside down. And God used real people to reach you. I want our congregation to keep reaching out.

II. **Real Christianity is not about man seeking God, but about God seeking man (v. 12)**

Verse 12 shows that real Christianity is not about man seeking God, but about God seeking man. Ordinarily, you're not going to find people like Saul wandering into a service like this to seek God. We've got to go out to seek them. Almost always, people come to Christ because ordinary people like you get excited and share your life with a friend. Notice that Paul was *not* seeking God. It says, "**While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests...**" It was while occupied in his opposition to God that God stopped Saul in his tracks and saved him. If that is not a testimony to sovereign grace, I don't know what is. But really, all grace is sovereign grace. It's not man seeking God – it is God seeking man. This is what distinguishes real Christianity from every other religion in the world.

And you know, the realization of this can free you up to relax when you witness. It's challenging to know that God uses us in our weakness to reach people, but it is comforting to know that the change of the heart is not up to us. It is God, and God alone who can convert a soul. So don't feel guilty when you feel like you have blown it by not saying things right. Blowing it is not a failure. The only failure is a failure to witness. God has used the most bumbling examples of witness to reach people.

I've told you about the young retarded gentleman in a large Southern Baptist church in Atlanta. He desired to be a witness, and he tried, but he was scared to death. But he figured he could at least hand out tracts. And that is something that any of us can do. If you want to be involved in tract distribution, let me know. If you want to be involved in Kamikaze street evangelism, let me know. But anyway, back to this guy, he finally got up the

courage to go out on the street and hand out tracts. He gave a tract to one businessman and asked him, “Do you want to go to heaven?” The man curtly said, “No.” The young man said, “OK. Well go to hell then.” It’s not the best model for witnessing, but it is a better model than saying nothing. In this case, God used it to convert the businessman, because he couldn’t get that phrase, “Well, go to hell then” out of his mind. And he realized that he was indeed headed toward hell. Those words became a cattle goad in his conscience until he finally read the tract, became converted, went to the church that was listed on the tract, and gave his testimony. Because real Christianity is about God seeking man, not vice versa, any of us can be used as God’s instruments for seeking the lost. If we keep in mind that the duty is ours, but the results are God’s, it can be very freeing. When it is God’s timing for a friend, relative, or neighbor to get saved, there is nothing that will be able to stop them from being saved. Salvation is 100% of God; 100% of grace. Saul contributed nothing.

III. Real Christianity is supernatural (v. 13)

And of course, that leads to verse 13 – real Christianity is supernatural. **“at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.”** That supernatural miracle would stay with Paul through the rest of his life. But you know what? Paul describes *every* regeneration of a human heart as a miracle of grace. Listen to 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, **“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** Christianity starts with the supernatural, and it should continue to be a supernatural walk that takes us from faith to faith, from grace to grace, and from glory to glory. Never stop depending upon the supernatural.

IV. Real Christianity is not a feel-good religion, but a God-centered religion (v. 14)

Of course, that does not mean that Christianity makes God into a super-duper-vending machine that is at our beck and call 24 hours a day. Some people treat miracles and the supernatural as if God is all about our comfort; as if God is our servant. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A. God is not interested in our comfort, but in our surrender (v. 14a)

What's the first thing that happens to Paul when he comes face to face with Jesus? Verse 14 says, "**And when we all had fallen to the ground...**" Real Christianity is overwhelmed with the awesomeness of God, and has a reverence for God. Any Christianity that treats God lightly is not a real Christianity. It is a Christianity that has never met God in His awesome power. I like the depiction of the fear-inspiring Aslan in the movie, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Whatever you think of Lewis or that movie, that scene was powerful. Aslan inspired fear and reverence into those who saw him. Hosea 11:10 says of Yahweh: "**he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.**" It doesn't deny that they are children, saved and secure, but they still come trembling. Do you tremble before the Almighty? Amos 3:8 says, "**The lion has roared – who will not fear? The Sovereign Yahweh has spoken.**" Real religion is not a feel-good religion, but a God-centered religion that demands unconditional surrender.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Susan said,

"I thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie, and make no mistake," said Mrs Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

But the balance that Mrs. Beaver brings to Lucy when *she* asks, "Is he safe?" was:

"Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good."

He isn't safe for those outside of Christ, like Paul was. He isn't safe for those inside of Christ who rebel. He isn't safe for those who only want to serve self. He's a father who disciplines. But He is good and He brings safety, love, joy, security and all that we need to those who will bow on their knees and declare ourselves to be His bondservants. And Hebrews 12:28-29 beautifully dovetails those two aspects – that God is not safe, but He is good. "**let us have grace** [there's His goodness. "Let us have grace"], **by which we may serve God** [When we know God is good we are attracted to Him, aren't we? We long to serve Him. "...grace by which we may serve God"] **acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.**" He is like a mighty lion that you would tremble before, and would not dare to cross. But He also attracts our hearts so thoroughly that we want to

serve Him and do anything that we can for Him. If you have never trembled like Paul did here, there is an aspect of God that you have not seen.

B. God knows how to speak our language (v. 14b)

You might have loved ones that you want to introduce to this mighty God, but they aren't interested. Don't worry. Neither was Paul. Paul was running the opposite direction. And you might think, "Yeah, but these guys that I'm thinking about are downright hostile to the Gospel." So was Paul. You might be discouraged at how long it has been that your loved ones have resisted the Gospel. Just realize that Jesus didn't convert Paul right away either. God has His perfect timing. And God knows our language. Verse 14 says, "**I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul'...**" Jesus knows everything about your loved ones. He knows their name, their language, their heartaches, their wants and despairs. He knows their language so well that he knows just what each one will need for a sound conversion.

In one of Billy Graham's prayer letters in 1989², he related a testimony given by a well-known banker in Uganda. When this banker's wife became a Christian he became extremely angry with her. When she did not renounce Christianity, but grew daily in her faith, it alienated him rather than winning him. And it made her very discouraged. She tried to be a faithful wife, but he grew more and more sullen, bitter, and hostile. As he became more depressed, he grew suicidal, but his bitterness made him want to take it out on his wife. He finally made up his mind to kill his wife, his children and then to commit suicide. He wanted to have an excuse for the murder. Just as a side note, people's minds work very strangely when they wallow in cesspool of bitterness. They can become very irrational. Anyway, he decided that he would accuse her of stealing the keys to his bank. Early one afternoon he left the bank and headed for a tavern. His route took him across a footbridge that extended over the headwaters of the Nile River. He paused above the river and dropped in his keys. He then spent the rest of the afternoon drinking and carousing, knowing that it would be his last day.

Back to the wife - later that afternoon his wife went to the fish market to buy the evening meal. She purchased a large Nile Perch (I've had those in Ethiopia – they're great), and as she was gutting the fish she felt something hard in the gut, cut it open, and to her astonishment found her husband's set

² July, 1989 Prayer Letter, as recorded in Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, Quotes* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 149.

of keys with his keychain on it. It had the keys to the house, the car, and the bank. She cleaned them up and hung them on the hook in the bedroom.

When the drunk young banker came home, he pounded on the door and demanded, “Woman, where are my keys?” Already in bed, she got up, picked them off the hook, and handed them to her husband. When the story came out, he fell on the floor sobbing, asking for forgiveness, and became converted. God knows our language; He knows our weak points, our vulnerabilities, and he knows just when and how to bring people to Himself. Rejoice in that. Take courage in that, and keep witnessing.

C. God confronts rebellion (v. 14c)

In verse 14 Jesus said, “**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**” This is turning everything Paul did from a horizontal focus to a vertical focus. That’s what happened with that banker, wasn’t it? He suddenly realized that he’s not just dealing with his wife. He’s dealing with the God of the universe, and all of his evil deeds have been sins against the Almighty.

That’s what happened to Paul. Suddenly Paul’s actions are seen to be not just against Christians, but against Jesus Himself. You see, this is the difference between what Martyn Lloyd Jones calls a “psychological conversion” and a “spiritual conversion.” Some people convert for psychological reasons. They are comfortable with Christianity – maybe it makes them feel better; or they convert for purposes of economic gain, friendship, aesthetics, or community. But that is simply a horizontal conversion. It’s not a true conversion. Spiritual conversions are all about God. We recognize that we live, and move, and have our being in God, and consequently we owe our all to Him. Anything less is seen as rebellion. True conversion is God-centered.

D. Salvation often comes as a consequence of painful conviction (v. 14d)

And frequently it is painful in the extreme. Jesus told Paul, “**It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**” The word for goads is a very sharp, pointy instrument that was used as a cattle prod to get cattle moving. It’s an image for our conscience. That businessman that I told you about had goads in his conscience, which in his case were saying, “Well go to hell then, well go to hell then.” The presence of these goads in Paul’s life implies that God has been at work in Paul’s life for quite some time. Paul was convicted. You would probably not have known that by looking at his persecuting exterior.

But underneath that shell was immense hurt that was driving Paul to God. And I want to explore what those goads were.

Most commentators believe that the goads were the testimonies of grace that he had heard as he imprisoned and persecuted and even killed Christians. The first one was Stephen in chapter 7. Paul saw Stephen's boldness; he heard Stephen asking God to forgive him; he saw Stephen's face like the face of an angel. He saw the difference between Stephen's love and his own hatred. And he had been tormented by that ever since. He felt guilty.

But there wasn't just one goad. It speaks here of "goads" (plural). There were other men, women, and children whom Saul of Tarsus had met first hand. Perhaps each one had an impact upon him with their words, expressions, and actions.

James Hewitt told the story of a lady in England whom he personally knew who had a guy come up to her on the street one day and out of the blue say, "Excuse me, ma'am, but I want to thank you." She looked at him and asked, "Thank me?" He said, "Yes'm, I used to be a ticket collector, and whenever you went by you always gave me a cheerful smile and a good morning. I knew that smile must come from inside somewhere. Then one morning I saw a little Bible in your hand. So I bought one too, and I found Jesus." She would never have known how the reality of her Christianity was used by God to bring this man into real Christianity if he had not told her. But God uses real Christians to bring the faith to others. It's sheep that reproduce sheep. I was reading in our family worship last night from Philippians 1 where Paul's example made most of the Christians bold in witnessing. Verse 14 says, "...**and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.**" It doesn't say, "most of the pastors." It says most of the brethren were involved in evangelism. This has always been the way it was. Sheep reproduce sheep.

You know, I really like the Gideons. They are constantly placing God's Word everywhere. One of the fun Gideon stories I've heard was about how this very passage I'm preaching on brought a person to faith. His name was Jacob Koshy. He grew up in Singapore, and had one driving ambition – to become wealthy. That led him into the world of gambling and drugs, and he eventually became lord of an international smuggling network. In 1980 he was caught and put into a government rehabilitation prison in Singapore. He was frustrated beyond measure. All of his goals, dreams, and ambitions

had come crumbling down. God was preparing him to listen. He was a smoker, and cigarettes weren't allowed in the center. But he was able to use bribery to smuggle loose tobacco in. Gideons had placed bibles in that prison, and he used the pages from one of those Bibles to roll his tobacco into cigarettes. One day he fell asleep while smoking, and when he woke up the cigarette had gone out. He unrolled the paper and read what was written: **“Saul, Saul, Why do you persecute me?”** And God's sword pierced him through to the heart. Jacob quickly asked for another Bible, read it, was soundly converted, and is now a missionary in the Far East. He once said, “Who would have believed that I could find the truth by smoking the Word of God?” You never know what goads God will use to win people to himself.

V. **Real Christianity is an unconditional surrender (v. 15)**

And at just the right moment God brought Saul to unconditional surrender. Verse 15: **“So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’** [Notice the word “Lord,” Paul is submitting to Jesus. Jesus has become his Lord.] **And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’** What's the implication? The implication is, stop persecuting Me. Stop being hostile. Stop living for yourself. Stop running away. Surrender.

Perhaps you have been running from Jesus and from a real Christianity. And Christ's words to you this morning are that religion is not enough. I urge you to put aside the empty religion of verses 1-11 (that we looked at last week) and to put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Real Christianity is all about unconditional surrender.

The problem for Paul was that if he surrendered, then his former friends would grow cold to him and would eventually persecute him. He knew the routine. He had seen it many times. He knew he would be in trouble. But Paul also knew that he couldn't have one foot in each kingdom. It was choosing his former life or submitting to Jesus in a whole new life. Real Christianity is raising the white flag and saying to Jesus, “I surrender all.”

All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give
 May I ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live
 All to Jesus I surrender, humbly at His feet I bow
 Worldly pleasures all forsaken, take me, Jesus, take me now.
 I surrender all, I surrender all,
 All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

Can you say that this morning? If you can, it is evidence that real Christianity is at work in you just as it was at work in Paul.

VI. Real Christianity restores us to our true calling of service to God (v. 16)

And it's interesting to see that God makes the choice for Paul before Paul can even make the choice. Before Paul can even respond, here's what God says in verse 16: **“But rise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.”** What encouraging words. Paul could have just been trashed and sent to hell, but God restores him. God had killed Paul's old life and restored Paul to a new life.

Point VI says, “Real Christianity restores us to our true calling of service to God.” While service *is fulfilling*, it is *service*, not fulfillment that is our vision. If Christianity was all about fulfillment, then Paul's call is worded rather strangely. In fact, in chapter 9 Jesus added, **“I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”** Now I'm not saying that Christianity is not fulfilling. It is. We saw that last week. But that fulfillment is a side benefit of our being servants of the Most High. It is a side-benefit of relentlessly pursuing our upward calling. And at the heart of that calling is service to Jesus in whatever He wants.

This is so different from the soft Christianity that so many people know. Isaac Watt's hymn, “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” tries to paint the picture that just as military life is quite different from civilian life, Christian life is quite different from ordinary life. One of the verses was emblazoned all across the wall of the huge auditorium where I went to school. It said, “Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?” True restoration is restoration from self-preoccupation to service; True Christianity is passionate about God's calling.

VII. Real Christianity is willing to penetrate Satan's kingdom of darkness trusting God for the results (v. 17)

And a major part of that calling is penetrating Satan's kingdom of darkness while trusting God for the results. And one of the Old Testament pictures of that was the conquest of Canaan. Every Israelite was involved. Numbers 32 was part of Moses' commission to the twelve tribes to take the land of Canaan. Every man was responsible to be part of the battle. In fact,

when Reuben and Gad wanted to settle on the east side of the Jordan River, Moses got angry and considered it apostasy. Battling the Canaanites was not an option. They quickly reassured Moses that they would fight with the other ten tribes, but they wanted to settle their wives and children on the east side of Jordan. (Of course, the children and wives were involved with prayer and support as well.) But that explanation satisfied Moses. In any case, Numbers 32 made it clear that every Israelite was responsible for taking Canaan. In the same way, the New Testament indicates that every real Christian is responsible to fulfill the Great Commission and to spread real Christianity. All those who are disciples are called to be fishers of men. Acts 8 says that everyone except the apostles was scattered abroad, and those who were scattered went everywhere speaking the Gospel. It is an every-Christian responsibility to penetrate Satan's kingdom.

Look at the warfare imagery in verse 17. It says, **“I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I send you.”** The main reason we fear witnessing is man. What will men think of me or do to me? But God can deliver us from their snare just as surely today as He did back then. Jesus' point in sharing this with Paul is that Paul could focus on his calling, and God would focus on His protection until it was time for Paul to come home to heaven.

And the remainder of Paul's calling in verse 18 is a summary of the heart of real Christianity. It says, **“to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”** Last week I gave an exposition of verse 18, so I won't do that today. But let's go to prayer, and let me make each phrase in verse 18 our united petition to the Almighty. Let's pray:

VIII. Real Christianity is passionate about reproduction of real Christianity (v. 18)

A. To bring sight to blind eyes

Lord God, we commit ourselves unreservedly to you. We believe your Gospel, and gladly receive your grace by faith. And it is our desire to spread that good news far and wide. We want to be used first of all, to bring sight to blind eyes. Lord, bring spiritual sight to our children. May not one of them fall away. And day by day open their eyes to new and glorious insights. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things out of Your law. Open the eyes of our governors, legislators, congressmen, and senators. Bless

Capitol Ministries as they seek to open blind eyes of rulers to the Gospel. Help these men and women to escape from the blindness that is plunging our nation into disaster.

B. To bring from darkness into light

You sent Paul to turn them from darkness to light, and we do not ever want to be satisfied with the dimness of pre-dawn light. We desire that the Sun of righteousness would rise with healing on His wings and cause the glory of the kingdom of light to take over every square inch of Satan's kingdom of darkness. Pierce the darkness of our own hearts. Pierce the darkness that keeps families and churches from flourishing. Pierce the darkness of our nation for the glory of Your own Son.

C. To rescue from Satanic power into God's power

Father, You sent Paul to rescue people from the *power* of Satan and to bring them into *Your own power*. May we not have a Christianity that is in word only, but may it be in word and in power. And we pray that in any area of life in which we have succumbed to satanic power, that You would break it off. As a fellow-believer who is seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and as one who has also been given delegated authority from You in this church, I break every stronghold that Satan has erected in this congregation. I declare Christ's triumph over these demons, and receive Christ's shalom. In the strong name of Jesus we refuse to submit to anything demonic. Thank you that your Son "**was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil**" (1John 3:8) and "**render powerless him who had the power of death...** We claim the second chapter of Hebrews' promise that You will "**release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage**" (Heb. 2:14-15). We receive that release into the lives of every person in our congregation. Thank you for your command, "**Resist the devil and he will flee from you**" (James 4:7). Make us effective in resisting the power of Satan in our families, in this church, and in this nation.

D. To see people forgiven of their of sins

You commissioned your apostle to bring the Gospel to others so that they might receive forgiveness of sins. Thank you for this forgiveness. Thank you for your promise that if we confess our sins you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And it is our desire that we might be used to bring others into the cleanness, joy, and freshness of your forgiveness. We break off any demonic strategies to keep our people from entering fully into your forgiveness. We renounce all

bitterness, and in our hearts we by faith give forgiveness to those who have hurt us, and used us, and been insensitive to us, and in any way have bothered us. We do not want lack of forgiveness to be a legal ground for Satan to continue to afflict our people, so we say, “I forgive you,” to those whom we have been bitter against, and we receive the cleansing of your grace and the forgiveness for this sin of bitterness.

E. To bring people into God’s inheritance

You also commissioned your apostle Paul to help bring people into their inheritance. We glory in the inheritance we have in heaven that we will enjoy forever and ever. We thank you that that eternal life begins right now. We thank you that having given us the Son, you also freely give us all things, both now and for eternity. We pray that you would bring the church of Jesus Christ more and more into the blessings that flow from faith and repentance. Expand our borders. With Jabez we pray, ““Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep *me* from evil, that I may not cause pain!” Give us Lord, the inheritance Jesus purchased for us.

F. To bring Christians into fellowship (“in Me...among those who are sanctified”)

You called your apostle Paul to bring people into fellowship with Jesus and into fellowship with each other. There is so much lack of unity in the truth, and we pray the unity of Ephesians 4, that we would all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man... that we would no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. Oh Lord, may the church of Jesus Christ speak the truth in love, and grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Jesus Christ.

G. To share in the sanctification of others

Please Lord, sanctify your church and make her holy. Cleanse her as Your own special bride, zealous for good works. You have said that where two or three agree together and ask anything that is according to Your will, that you would grant it, and you have said in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “**this is the will of God, your sanctification.**” So by faith we rejoice that you will answer this prayer and perfect that good work that you have begun in us.

H. To bring people to walk by faith

And may we walk in the faith that verse 18 speaks about all the days of our life. Give us your presence. Do not send us if you do not go up with us. We pray these things in the strong name of Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

Conclusion

Real Christianity

Acts 26:11-18

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-16-2009

Introduction

- I. Real Christianity reaches sinners, even if they are self-righteous (v. 9-11)
- II. Real Christianity is not about man seeking God, but about God seeking man (v. 12)
- III. Real Christianity is supernatural (v. 13)
- IV. Real Christianity is not a feel-good religion, but a God-centered religion (v. 14)
 - A. God is not interested in our comfort, but in our surrender (v. 14a)
 - B. God knows how to speak our language (v. 14b)
 - C. God confronts rebellion (v. 14c)
 - D. Salvation often comes as a consequence of painful conviction (v. 14d)
- V. Real Christianity is an unconditional surrender (v. 15)
- VI. Real Christianity restores us to our true calling of service to God (v. 16)
- VII. Real Christianity is willing to penetrate Satan's kingdom of darkness trusting God for the results (v. 17)
- VIII. Real Christianity is passionate about reproduction of real Christianity (v. 18)
 - A. To bring sight to blind eyes
 - B. To bring from darkness into light
 - C. To rescue from Satanic power into God's power
 - D. To see people forgiven of their of sins
 - E. To bring people into God's inheritance
 - F. To bring Christians into fellowship ("in Me...among those who are sanctified")
 - G. To share in the sanctification of others
 - H. To bring people to walk by faith

Conclusion