

UNSTOPPABLE
GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD**OUR PURPOSE
FOUND IN HIM**

Lesson 23

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DEVOTIONAL

[The Lord speaking to Paul] "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18).

THOUGHTS FOR TODAY:

One of the more challenging things to do in businesses is to write a mission statement (a few sentences that effectively communicate and encapsulate what the business all about, the values it represents, and its purpose or its reason for being). It's not an easy thing to do because there is so much to say; and so many things that can be said. I absolutely love our passage today because it succinctly and elegantly expresses our purpose as Christians on this earth. It is God's "Heavenly Vision," or rather God's Mission Statement for us, and it is twofold:

"Open their eyes"

I'm sure you probably remember the story of Samson and Delilah. After much pestering, Samson finally revealed the secret of his strength to Delilah—his hair, which she promptly cut off once he fell asleep. When the Philistines attacked, Samson awoke to fight but was not aware the Spirit had departed him. (The Spirit was the source of his strength, Judges 16:20.) As a result, the Philistines were able to capture him, bind him, poke his eyes out, and turn him into a slave. Sin is just like that— we know it's bad for us but it can be entertaining or even enjoyable for a while; then when we finally wake up, we find out it's too late because we're already overpowered. I think the really sad part of this story is Samson was so involved and preoccupied with sin that it blinded him far before he ever lost his eyes—so much so he didn't even notice when the Spirit left him. He was blinded and bound by sin far before the Philistines ever attacked to seal his fate.

"Turn them from darkness to light"

God told Paul/us that it is our mission to turn people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. For Jesus there was no middle ground. No grading upon the scale, no tolerance for alternative beliefs, and certainly no excusing because of parents or societal issues. Sin is a human fault; we all suffer from it equally; and there is only one solution: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Matthew 12:30, Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me." I think that's pretty clear.

In this our final step to recovery from whatever ails us, it's really pretty simple: we open our eyes to sin (which the previous 3 steps allow us to see with clarity), then we turn from darkness to light (from the power of Satan to God). It's a choice we all must make—either we cave in to the darkness of depression, despair and hopelessness, or turn to the light and our hope of glory in Christ Jesus. Which choice will you make?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

Have you opened your eyes to sin today? What is the Lord speaking to you about right now? As the Lord casts His Holy light upon our sin our next step is very simple: we must make a conscious decision to turn away from sin and to the Lord. Will you turn now? The Lord is waiting to forgive and rescue—all we have to do is ask and accept.¹

OPEN IT

1. **What types of things drive you crazy? How do you respond when these things cross your path?**

READ IT

Acts 26

EXPLORE IT

2. **Where did Paul put his hope according to verse 6?**
3. **What was Paul convinced of doing in verse 9?**
4. **To whom was Paul sent and what was he to do for them?**
5. **What did Agrippa think was driving Paul crazy?**
6. **What was Agrippa's decision concerning Paul?**
7. **Where was Paul heading after his time before Agrippa?**

¹ Devotional by Mike Brooks found @ <https://www.ptl.org/code/devotionals.php?day=428> Copyright ©2019 The Pocket Testament League®.

APPLY IT

Our text gives us the longest of Paul's defenses in the Book of Acts. This one is before Festus, Agrippa, and his sister/lover, Bernice, along with many important dignitaries from the Roman capital, Caesarea. It is the third time that Luke repeats Paul's testimony of his conversion. Paul especially focuses on the commission that the risen Lord Jesus gave to him, to go to the Gentiles so that they might repent and turn to God (26:18, 20). As in all the apostolic witness in Acts, Paul's testimony rests on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.²

8. **Paul's audience was filled with rich and famous people. How can preaching to such a crowd both then and now come with some specific difficulties?**

9. **Paul held very little in common with his audience. What can we learn from Paul's example of preaching to a crowd very different from us? What things keep us from sharing with people different from us?**

DON'T WORRY....BE HAPPY

The word "happy" (fortunate ESV) in verse 2 is a translation of the word often translated in the New Testament as "blessed." Paul saw himself blessed by God to be in a position to share the gospel. That is pretty amazing when you consider that the very hand he stretched forth was, in all likelihood, manacled for the message (v. 1). Note that Paul saw himself as a prisoner, not of man but rather of the Lord (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1, 9, 23). To the Romans he was "Paul the prisoner" (23:18), but he took a very different view on the matter. Paul was clearly taking a page out of Peter's book (see 1 Peter 3:15). He was happy to answer why he was hopeful. When we face difficulties—at work, at university, in marriage, from culture in general—do we see them as providential opportunities for the gospel or as difficulties we must simply endure? Let us count ourselves "happy" to witness of our hope in Christ.

10. **What emotions do you have when you share the gospel with others? What does the Bible tell us about sharing our faith that should produce "happy hearts" within us?**

² Sermon excerpt by Steven Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-67-your-response-resurrection-acts-2523-2632>

Paul felt “happy” to be able to tell his story (Acts 26:2 NKJV). Sharing the good news of Jesus with an audience of movers and shakers was better than a trip to Disneyland!³

11. Paul felt “fortunate” or “blessed” to stand before people as a prisoner who had been imprisoned for more than two years. How do we go about tapping into that same type of joyful outlook on life when we are distressed and downtrodden?

12. Who in your life has shown an outlook on life like Paul’s amidst difficulty and trouble? What allowed them to find such joy?

MY “RAP” SHEET

Saul the Pharisee was **convinced** that it was his solemn duty to oppose the name and the claims of Jesus of Nazareth as those of an impostor. Moreover, he had the courage of his convictions. He began his persecuting programme in Jerusalem. Armed with authority from the chief priests, he not only imprisoned many disciples of Jesus, but even, when they were “sentenced to death” (JB), cast his vote against them. He searched the synagogues for Christians in order to bring them to punishment. “The synagogue punishment of whipping will be meant here.” He tried by force to make them blaspheme (the phrase indicates that he by no means always succeeded), and in his “obsession (RSV, “in raging fury”) he pursued them even to “foreign cities”.⁴

13. Paul openly shared things he did as a younger man that he was no doubt embarrassed and remorseful over. What are some things in the past that you did that you wish you hadn't? Has God been able to use any of these experiences for your good and His glory?

14. Saul (Paul) was convinced that he was doing God a favor by ridding the world of Christians. In what ways can unbelievers deceive themselves today? How can Scripture help to circumvent such thinking?

³ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5308-5309). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Stott, John. *The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today Series)* (Kindle Locations 6761-6767). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

“It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 26:14). A “goad” was a sharp-pointed stick used to drive animals. Traditionally, this image has suggested Paul’s wrestling against a guilty conscience, but it is better to understand the image as the Lord’s “prodding him in another direction which he had no choice but to follow.” Paul’s attempt to resist the “definite plan” of God was doomed to failure.⁵

15. What “goads” did God use to draw you closer to him? Did you like Saul (Paul) kick against them? What happened?

Paul’s orders from God included a summary of what Jesus does for people (Acts 26: 18):

1. Opens their eyes making them able to see things they never saw before.
2. Turns them from spiritual darkness (deceit, evil) to light (transparency, holiness).
3. Transfers them from the power of Satan to the power of God, making them able to live obediently, victoriously.
4. Gives them forgiveness of sins and a share with the sanctified, re-creating and purifying their lives as they trust in Jesus.

Early Christians refused to let another person’s immoral lifestyle hinder them from sharing Jesus’s love with that person.⁶

16. What do the four things (above) that Jesus does for unbelievers in salvation tell us about the lost condition of the unbelievers around us? How does our walk of holiness help to show them their need?

People need spiritual help. They need the assured hope of a blessed resurrection. But they will often not admit it because of self-righteousness. To confess that one needs a Saviour is offensive. But what is especially offensive is the idea that we are in such bad shape before a holy God that our resurrection will be unto damnation unless we confess that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose to justify us before God.⁷

17. How can sharing our own personal story as Paul did be a disarming and compelling way to show people their problem with sin and their need for a Savior?

⁵ Thomas, Derek W. H. *Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries)* (p. 696). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5324-5330). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Sermon Excerpt from Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/hopeful-evangelism/>

Let people know what your life was like before you met Jesus. That doesn't mean going into sordid detail as some do and end up glorifying sin. It does mean letting people know that you were a sinner in need a Savior who would correct your wrong beliefs and set you on the path of righteousness. The particular details you share should be chosen to identify yourself with your audience as much as possible. This gives hope that they also can change.⁸

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?

Paul was highly educated and intellectually brilliant. In Festus's opinion (or was it a derisive joke?) superior learning had driven the prisoner over the edge. No sensible man would turn his whole nation against him (see Acts 25: 24) for such fantastical philosophical foolishness. Paul used two Greek words to defend what he'd been saying (Acts 26: 25): *aletheias*—"true," in harmony with reality, and *sophrosunes*—"reasonable," mentally sound. When a person knows Jesus, nothing makes more sense than that Jesus is alive! His being alive is what makes life in this crazy world finally make sense. To genuinely link up with God is to be in touch with reality.⁹

18. What causes the world to think that Christians are crazy? Is there any merit to these claims? How do we go about dissuading the world of such thinking?

19. Paul seems to almost persuade Agrippa to become a Christian. Who around you is on the cusp of believing, and what can you be doing to move them along in that direction?

20. In Acts 26:32, King Agrippa speaks to Governor Felix and appears to have concluded that Paul is innocent of the charges. Paul has a great reputation. What steps might you take this week to enhance your reputation, credibility, and attitude?

⁸ Sermon Excerpt from Scott Harris found @ https://gracebibleny.org/how_to_give_your_testimony_acts_26_1_32

⁹ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5365-5371). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Note: This study was compiled, and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups