

There are two types of people in the world, those who talk and those who act. We have all heard people being described as someone who talks a good game! Aye, they talk a good game meaning that all they ever do is talk, and they never act. It's the same with Christians: There are those who talk about the importance of reaching the lost with the gospel, and there are those who actually talk to the lost. Which one are you? We haven't been saved just to sit in church and sing and pray each week, we've been saved to share. Do you know what God's greatest tool is to reach others for Jesus Christ? The answer is You! 75% of new believers come to Christ through a friend or acquaintance who influences them and invites them to church. Every one of us has the most powerful tool available to be an effective witness for Christ; our personal testimony.

That's all Paul had as he stood before the king in Acts 26. In this chapter we see three simple things Paul did, and that we can do to become effective witnesses for Christ.

First: Remember life before Christ. As Paul stands before King Agrippa, he begins by describing his life before he became a Christian. *My life from my youth was spent among my own nation at Jerusalem. The Jews knew that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.* (v5) Paul was a Hebrew by birth, a Roman citizen raised in the Greek city of Tarsus and had studied under one of the greatest Jewish rabbis of all time, and he was a Pharisee who were the theological conservatives of their day. They were meticulously and painstakingly religious. Paul was so meticulously religious that he saw it as his duty to persecute Christians and he made it his passion to hunt down Christians.

Paul is like every person born into this world. He wasn't born a believer in Jesus Christ for no one is born a Christian; we have to make a decision to accept Christ. Because we are all subject to the fall, and this happened in the Garden of Eden, we are all born as sinners, although as babies it's unlikely we will have sinned, and so it could be said that we are all *born against Christ*.

Like Paul, we may have been born into religious families, but that doesn't make us Christian's, any more than being born in a garage makes us cars! We're all born as unbelievers. Until we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour we are condemned just as Paul was. ***He who does not believe in Jesus is condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)*** In order to give an effective testimony, we must go back to the time in our lives before we accepted Christ, and understand our condition before Christ, which was to be separated from God and in need of forgiveness.

Second: Recall our conversion to Christ. There have been many remarkable conversions in the history of Christianity, but none more remarkable than Paul's. His experience on the road to Damascus, resulted in the gospel being carried to the centre of the Roman Empire, and half the books of the NT being written.

Paul shifts the conversation from his past before he met the Lord, to his experience of meeting the risen Christ: *As the blinding flash knocked me to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me saying; Saul, why are you persecuting Me? I asked; Who are You, Lord? And He said; I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (v13 to 15)*. Paul is unique among the other disciples in that he is like you and I. All the other disciples knew Jesus in the chronological sequence of His birth, life, death and resurrection. But Paul, like us, encounters Jesus after His resurrection, death, life and birth. Paul meets Jesus through the Holy Spirit because the physical form of Jesus had returned to the Father.

When Paul asked *who are you Lord?* and received the answer *I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*, Paul's religion collapsed like a house of cards! He finally realized that he didn't need religion, he needed redemption! He didn't need Judaism, he needed Jesus. He didn't need a synagogue, he needed a Saviour! Paul had seen a new light and he was now under a new Lord and he was filled with a new love. He was changed and it happened at a certain time and place. I believe that some Christians can tell you exactly where and when they accepted Jesus. For others it's a gradual process.

But for all of us, there is a time when we realise we have accepted Christ and that we have salvation through a risen Saviour called Jesus. And that experience becomes one's personal testimony. Can we point to a time when we had an encounter with Jesus and understood that He died on the cross and was raised from the dead to pay for our sins? And did that realisation lead us to ask forgiveness for our sins, and by faith ask Christ into our lives? That's the key question we should ask ourselves when we come to the Lord's Table at Communion. No matter how simple our faith stories may be, never underestimate the power nor the impact of your own conversion experience on the lives of others!

Third and last: Share your faith in Christ. Paul was not finished and as King Agrippa was to learn to his sorrow, Paul was not on the defence during his interrogation, he was on the offense. Paul may have been Agrippa's prisoner but he was planning to take prisoners for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the very reason that Jesus saved Paul: *I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness of the things which you have seen, and things I will yet reveal to you. (v16)*

Jesus expressly told Paul why he appeared to him, and why He saved him. Jesus made Paul a minister and the Greek word here literally means *under-rower*, which referred to a sailor under command of the captain. From this point on Paul was no longer under the command of the Jewish leaders or even his own heart, he was now under the command of Jesus Christ. But furthermore, God had called Paul to be a messenger or a witness. Again, the Greek word for witness is *martus* which gives us the English word martyr. A martyr originally meant someone who had information about something and can testify to it.

Paul had been saved and given a specific assignment. His job was to go to everyone he could *and turn them from darkness to light, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus. (v18).*

That's why Paul said to King Agrippa in v19: *Therefore King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision!* Now this is the crux of the issue: To fail to share what Jesus has done for us with others is to disobey the very Lord who has saved us! Notice that Paul was simply to do two things: Share his testimony and call for a decision on the part of those with whom he was sharing. As Paul travelled about Damascus, Judea and Asia Minor, sharing what Christ had done for him, *he would then share that people should repent and accept Jesus Christ as saviour.* (v20) Our job as witnesses for Christ is to simply tell others about Him; and then call for people to make a response to what we've shared.

At first reading, it appears as if Paul was unsuccessful. *Then Agrippa said to Paul, you almost persuaded me to become a Christian.* (v28) We may think from this that Paul had wasted his time because Agrippa did not come to Christ, but listen carefully: Paul was successful because he was faithful. He was obedient to the calling God had given him. Any witness is successful when they shares the truth of Jesus Christ and their own faith story and then leaves the results to God. Because all that God has called us to do is to simply tell the truth about Jesus!

At this point Mike should share his own personal testimony of how he came to Christ. And then encourage the congregation to turn to their neighbour and tell their story. Allow five minutes for this.

How difficult was that? Even if you did not share your story with someone this morning, I hope you at least began to think about how you could explain your faith, and then perhaps form your story for the time when God brings someone into your life who is not a Christian. If we don't tell our stories, then how will people come to faith? If we don't tell our stories, then the Christian faith will die and we will have some explaining to do when we are asked by God to give an account of our lives and our faith. As you leave today think about this, and if you don't have a testimony or faith story, today you can begin to consider one. then share it with others. And may God bless you all, **Amen.**