

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and hear words from His mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.’” – Acts 22:12-16 NIV

Your Testimony.

This is the second of three accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts. It is important to understand that when Paul is declaring his testimony this time, he is speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem. They had known who he had been – a devout Pharisee and a persecutor of the early church. So his conversion was not only a profound story, but also a confronting and powerful example of God’s power.

Paul emphasizes the reason why he had changed so drastically to become a Christian with two main pieces of evidence: “you will be a witness to all you have seen and heard.” (v15).

In the Greek the word ‘witness’ directly means someone who testifies based on first-hand experience. Paul SAW Jesus in all His glory and he HEARD Jesus speak first-hand.

In our lives, people can argue about our own doctrine, our ideas and cultures, our thinking and our actions. But

there is one thing no one can attack: your first hand experience of God. Your testimony is a fortress for your faith. No one will be able to convince you otherwise once you have tangibly seen and heard the power of God at work in your life.

What have you seen of God? What have you heard from God? When last did you have a first-hand encounter with Him? Pray today for the Holy Spirit to remind you of the power of your testimony, and while you’re at it maybe ask Him for a fresh demonstration of His power in your life as well.

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” – Acts 23:11 NIV

Take Courage.

Paul's testimony about Jesus has placed him in some hot water with the Jewish leaders. They are plotting to kill him because of the powerful conversion and conviction Paul represented. His testimony about Jesus had resulted in great opposition.

Throughout Acts, as well as in modern times, it is evident that the Good News about Jesus risen from the dead and its implications for us as Christians causes conflict. The Gospel does not make sense. But the power of it is very evident in people who have chosen to believe. And the world does not like what it cannot understand. It is OK to grapple with understanding elements of God and His will in your world. But never place your desire to understand higher than the divine persuasion (faith) that Jesus is alive and the Holy Spirit is present with you in this moment.

Whatever we are going through in this season – whatever controversy or conflict you find yourself in, I believe the words Jesus spoke hold power for you today:

1. Take Courage! The Greek word for this phrase literally

means ‘to be warmed from within’ – to be strengthened on the inside. No matter what wintry, cold and confronting things are happening to you, I believe the warmth of God will bolster you and keep you from shuddering. God has given you inner strength for today.

2. As you have testified... Your testimony will take you places. It is written in Revelation 12:10-11 that we overcome the accuser by the blood of Jesus and the WORD of our TESTIMONY. Don't let anything silence the story of God unfolding in your life. Keep telling people about the relevance of God in your daily life and you will not only be protected from today's troubles, but will be used by God in greater ways than you think possible.

[Governor Felix] ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs. Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul talked about righteousness, selfcontrol and the judgement to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” – Acts 24:23-25 NIV

Keep Speaking.

Paul was in a lockdown situation very similar to our own. When we read this chapter it is important to remember that even though we can read it in a few minutes, this was a two-year-long portion of Paul’s life!

He was stuck in a place with limited ability to move around and he had no idea when he would be freed or allowed to go. In fact, he was strung along by the whims of the ruler he was subject to – tempted with moments of release but never being set free.

Paul had an urgency to build the church and testify about Jesus to the world. But he was stuck in an informal state of limbo. I love that even in this kind of uncertainty, Paul still testified boldly whenever he had the opportunity. As we read in verse 25, Paul spoke to his captor about righteousness. He broached the subject of self-control and even went as far as telling Felix about the judgement day when Jesus returns. And

these heavy topics convicted Felix to the point where he couldn’t handle it and had to send him away. But Felix continued to call for Paul to speak the gospel.

Even in this unsure time, are you willing to speak the full gospel whenever you have the opportunity to? What are some reasons why you hold back when it comes to your faith? Whether it is fear, inferiority, lack of understanding or shame, bring it to God today and ask Him to help you speak the Truth of God into the lives of those He has entrusted to you.

When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but the could not prove them. Then Paul made his defense: “I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.”
Acts 25:7-8 NIV

Stand Fearless.

Once again, Paul is on trial – before a new ruler. And once again, he has to defend himself against the accusations of the opposers. What is incredible to recognize is that the passion of those against Paul had not weakened within the time he was in prison. In our world where causes come and go, where awareness is no longer equitable with action, the clear endurance of the opposition towards Paul and the gospel is a telling sign of the importance of His message.

In verse 7 it says Paul’s accusers ‘stood around’ him, but the Greek infers something a little more metaphorical with the statement. The word used actually means to ‘give a wide girth’ or ‘to avoid’. In both cases, we can learn what it means to have the God of Heaven’s Armies on our side. In Psalm 27:3 it speaks about how an army can surround me, but my heart will not fear. What is surrounding you today? What accusations are trying to undermine your credibility as a child of God? Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with a supernatural confidence to keep on declaring Jesus in this season. So you can answer any question or trial you face with a

level-headed and peaceful spirit. Just like Paul did. He was not whipped up in the emotion of those around him, although he had the most to lose and was wrongfully accused. He cut through the confusion with honest and informed insight because of his ability not to be distracted from God’s will at work through him.

It is the same for us today. Many things will try to take you off course and sabotage God’s will. But you do not need to fear them. Find confidence in God and no charge brought against you will stand.

When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Psalm 27:2 NIV

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Paul replied, “Short time or long – I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.” – Acts 26:28-29 NIV

Everyone.

Who in your world has not received salvation yet? You might be getting tired or weary of waiting for them to choose Jesus. This is Paul’s fourth trial and King Agrippa is the most informed of all the rulers he appealed to. Paul recounts his testimony again and then appeals to the King. Agrippa is sceptical, but also reactionary – which reveals the fact that he was, in fact, impressed or affected by Paul’s testimony.

Maybe the people in your world who still need to meet Jesus are more receptive than you know. No matter what the situation or the sense of urgency you hold, it is important to remind yourself that you are not responsible for someone else’s salvation. You are only responsible to obey God and share your testimony.

Verse 29 reveals our response to the reality of unbelief: “Short time or long – I pray to God...” No matter how long it takes, do not grow weary in asking GOD to draw people to repentance.

Jesus testified about Himself:
“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”
John 12:32 NIV

Ask God for a revelation of what He is doing in the lives of those you are believing to find salvation. Surrender your efforts and ask Him to lead you in encouraging your loved ones towards Christ. Release any sense of judgement over them and ask Jesus to draw them towards Himself today.

Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food – you haven’t eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.”
– Acts 27:33-34 NIV

Eat.

We forget to eat when we are in a storm. The troubles and turbulence of reality can sometimes shock you out of rhythm and starve you in the most subtle of ways. The urgent and immediate can overshadow your hunger for the important.

If you took a look at your life today, in what areas would you say you are malnourished or hungry? In Matthew 4, Jesus quotes Moses who said, “*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”

What has God said that you have not ‘ingested’ in a while?

1. If you are tired, it is time to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and the empowering grace of God. *‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ 2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV*

2. If you are frustrated, it is time to surrender to the peace of God through prayer. *‘... present your requests to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.’ Philipians 4:3-4 NIV*

3. If you are demoralized, it is time to be nourished by the

hope of Jesus and His purpose on the earth. *‘... it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may greatly be encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for our soul, firm and secure...’ Hebrews 6:18-19 NIV*

4. If you are confused, it is time to be enthused by the divine persuasion (faith) of heaven, found in the hearing of scripture. *‘... faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.’ Romans 10:17 NIV*

In the storm, you need to EAT and just as Paul promised those onboard, you will survive – you will get through this – with every single hair on your head. Your head may get wet, but you’ll make it to the shore of this storm if you strengthen yourself with the words of God.

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance! – Acts 28:30-31 NIV

Legacy.

What a journey! The radical adventure of the early church has been nothing less than inspiring and challenging. We have read of dramatic God-encounters, miraculous signs and bold demonstrations of the saving power of Jesus Christ. We have also read of the human failings of those zealous believers, the fierce opposition and persecution they had to face, and also how the gospel will confuse and confound the rulers of this world.

The culmination of this great account are these final words about Paul: ***‘For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance!’ Acts 28:30-31 NIV***

As we continue to live radical lives for Jesus – filled with the Holy Spirit. I believe that we are left with some timely reminders in the summation of Paul’s life.

1. Welcome all. The good news about Jesus is for everyone. Bring them into your space and let your hospitality testify of the power of God in your life.
2. Proclaim the kingdom. Announce with conviction that there is a new kingdom that is coming – a new way of living that is dictated and mandated by the authority of Jesus. Live under the rulership of Christ and expect to be different – for you are a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20), and not of this world (John 15:19).

3. Teach people about Jesus. Make people curious about Jesus Christ. Whet their appetite to know and learn about who He is.

4. Be bold! The word in the Greek means to speak freely with the intent that it be remembered. Have courage with what you say. Tell the world that Jesus lives!

5. Don’t be hindered. Don’t let anything stop you from living the life God has called you to. Get creative – Paul couldn’t visit the churches, so he wrote letters – the very ones that we now have canonised in our Bibles today.

Don’t let any situation – no lockdown, bad report, frustrating situation or physical constraint – stop you from declaring the good news – that Jesus loves everyone, that He is powerful to save, that His Spirit is readily available to us, and that knowing Him is the greatest adventure that will last beyond time itself.