

Answering Critics
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Acts 26:19-29

Illustration: *“You have new updates to your software, what would you like to do?”* How many of us usually click: *“Try again tomorrow?”*

“The timing just wasn’t right; better wait for another place and another time.”

How many times have we all rationalized and excused ourselves out of doing something uncomfortable or inconvenient with the excuse, *“this isn’t the time or the place?”* The Apostle Paul was never embarrassed or intimidated about sharing the simple message of the gospel no matter the time, the place, or the audience; even if that audience held great power and position in the eyes of men.

It’s not surprising that Paul wrote, *“...I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* (Rom.1:16)ⁱ He also wrote, *“...now is the favorable time;...now is the day of salvation.”*ⁱⁱ

Paul was a man on a mission and the time was always right to share his story of how Jesus changed him and how He could change them too. Paul shared respectfully and even changed up the way he shared his testimony depending on his audience (i.e. the philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17?) But he always looked for the opening to share both his story and the message of the gospel.

- When we last saw Paul he was almost killed by angry Jews in a riot.
- When they discovered Paul was a Roman citizen he was sent to Caesarea for Felix, the governor of the province to sort it out.
- Felix procrastinated to placate the Jews and after two years another governor, Porcius Festus, was appointed yet Paul was still in jail.
- Festus was perplexed as to what to do about Paul and tried to send him back to Jerusalem, but Paul (as a Roman citizen) appealed to Caesar.

- Festus said, *“To Caesar you go! But how do I explain this to Caesar?”*
- Enter King Herod Agrippa. Agrippa ruled over Judea as his father and uncle (also Herods) had. His traveling companion was his sister and mistress, Bernice. Their incestuous relationship was well known.
- Agrippa and Bernice came for a visit to Caesarea and Festus shared his “Paul dilemma” with them.
- Agrippa said he’d like to hear from Paul himself, so Festus set it up.
- Paul was allowed to testify as to why the Jews were trying to have him killed. While defending his innocence under the law, Paul had another perfect opening to share his testimony and a simple gospel message.
- By the way, our testimony is only the “opener” in sharing the gospel. If we’re not careful we can neglect to share the actual message of salvation. As we will see, Paul did BOTH.
- He shared his testimony of growing up as a well-educated Jew, and how Jesus got his attention on the road to Damascus, giving him the mission of sharing the message of salvation to the Jews and especially the Gentiles.
- At this point Paul shifts from testifying about his innocence under the law to testifying about who Jesus is and how He saves people, even kings.

Acts 26:19–29 (ESV)

¹⁹ “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

- Verse 19: Paul never disobeyed the orders Jesus gave him. He declared this simple message: “they should (1) repent and (2) turn to God, (3) perform[ing] deeds in keeping with their repentance.”
- This was not salvation by “works.”
- He said the Jews hated that message and wanted to kill the messenger.
- Verse 22: Paul said he witnessed to both the “small and great” and shared what “Moses and the prophets” had predicted in the Old Testament.
- **Why is it important to point to Scripture when sharing the gospel? To what verses might a person point?**
- **Why did Paul bring up Moses and the Prophets to King Agrippa?**
- In John 5:46 (ESV) Jesus said to the unbelieving Pharisees: *“...if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”*
- Paul tells his audience what Moses and prophets predicted, referring back to what Jesus said in Luke 24:44-47. Look at verse 23: *“Moses said...²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”^{xiii}*
- Paul was sharing a simple gospel message: (1) All humans are sinners; (2) Christ (God’s only Son) died to pay for our sins; (3) He rose from the dead to give us everlasting life, if (4) we will repent of our sins and trust Him as our Savior and Lord.
- This week in the news coverage of Billy Graham’s transition to Heaven we’ve heard over and over two things that match up with this passage:
 - Billy Graham worked the gospel message into every opportunity he had to speak.
 - And, it was a simple gospel message. Nothing fancy, simple truth.
- Like Paul, Mr. Graham always turned his remarks to the gospel. That’s the mission of an evangelist. I was watching a video of Mr. Graham accepting the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of himself and Ruth in 1996.

- He graciously and humbly thanked the Members of Congress, recognized his team, and then immediately shifted to the message of the gospel.
- Mr. Graham speaking to that group of the highest leaders of our government first shared his story and the gospel:

"I would not be here today receiving this honor if it were not for an event that happened to me many years ago as a teenager on the outskirts of Charlotte, NC. An evangelist came through our town for a series of meetings. I came face-to-face with the fact that God loved me, Billy Graham, and had sent His Son to die for my sin. He told how Jesus rose from the dead to give us hope of eternal life. I never forgot a verse of Scripture that was quoted, ``As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John [1:12](#), KJV). That meant that I must respond to God's offer of mercy and forgiveness. I had to repent of my own sins and receive Jesus Christ by faith. When the preacher asked people to surrender their lives to Christ, I responded. I had little or no emotion; I was embarrassed to stand with a number of other people when I knew some of my school peers saw me; but I meant it. And that simple repentance and open commitment to Jesus Christ changed my life."

- Then Mr. Graham "called the question" challenging these leaders:

"Jesus taught there are only two roads in life. One is the broad road that is easy and well-traveled, but which leads to destruction. The other, He said, is the narrow road of truth and faith that at times is hard and lonely, but which leads to life and salvation. As we face a new millennium, I believe America has gone a long way down the wrong road. We must turn around and go back and change roads. If ever we needed God's help, it is now. If ever we needed spiritual renewal, it is now. And it can begin today in each one of our lives, as we repent before God and yield ourselves to Him and His Word. What are YOU going to do?"^v

- Billy Graham could have simply given a gracious speech and said thank you for this high honor. But as I've heard in countless interview clips this week, he always moved the conversation to a simple gospel message.

- Back to Paul, Festus, and Agrippa. When Paul brought up the truth of Christ's resurrection, Governor Festus interrupted him with sarcasm.

24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." 25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. 26 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."

- Paul wasn't testifying to save his own neck. He was witnessing so Christ could save Agrippa and anyone in the room. Look at Agrippa's response:

28 And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

- In the NKJV: *"You almost persuade me to become a Christian."*^v
- Some think Agrippa was on the edge of walking the aisle. Scholars believe he was likely being facetious in an attempt to be clever and sarcastic.
- John MacArthur: *"A better translation is "Do you think you can convince me to become a Christian in such a short time?" Recognizing his dilemma, Agrippa parried Paul's question with one of his own."*^{vi}

29 And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

- Paul was saying, *"I'll share this simple gospel message with you and all those around as long as necessary if only you would believe in Christ."*
- There's no indication that anyone was converted to Christ that day.
- This text is a warning to anyone who hasn't trusted Christ as Savior and Lord: Don't be like Agrippa. The writer of Hebrews

quoted Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ As it is said, *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

- Festus and Agrippa agreed Paul had done nothing deserving death.
- In fact, Agrippa commented, *“This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”*ⁱⁱ But Paul appealed to Caesar because Caesar was in Rome and that’s where God had told Paul to go.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Because he was a great evangelist on a mission, Paul always looked for an opening to share the gospel. This is important: Though he was bold and unafraid, he didn’t do it like a “bull in a china shop” (note how respectful he was in addressing Festus and Agrippa.)
- The Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,”* (emphasis mine.)
- We may not all have the gift of evangelism like Paul or Billy Graham, but every follower of Christ has been “commissioned” to “go” and “make disciples (Matthew 28:19.)
- Paul’s example should remind and encourage believers to look for every opportunity to share our testimony of what Christ has done for us and THEN share the simple message of what He can do for them, the message of the gospel.
- The question: What can you and I do this week to be better prepared for those opportunities?

ⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (Ro 1:16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (2 Co 6:2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱⁱ The suffering of Jesus was the fulfillment of OT prophets (see Luke 24:26–27, 45–48; Acts 2:24–36; 3:17–26; 13:32–39; Crossway Bibles. ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 136697-136698). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Congressional Record, Volume 142 Issue 68 (Wednesday, May 15 , 1996)

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-1996-05-15/html/CREC-1996-05-15-pt1-PgH5138.htm>

^v *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ac 26:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

^{vi} MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Kindle Locations 49299-49301). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

^{vii} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ac 26:32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.