

“I Have Appeared to You for This Purpose”: Jesus Saves Us to Send Us

Introduction

The Text

- A. This is now our third week in [Acts 26](#). Paul, you remember, is standing before both the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king Herod Agrippa II.
 - 1. In one sense, he’s offering a defense for himself.
 - 2. In another sense, we come to find by the end that he’s truly offering a defense for the gospel, for Jesus and his resurrection in particular.
- B. We spent the first couple of weeks unpacking what Paul says down in [v. 25](#) of this chapter: namely, that the Christian faith, as presented by Paul here, is both “[true and rational](#).”
- C. But now I want to shift my magnifying glass to a different place in the chapter and consider a few more verses with you—[vv. 16-18](#) in particular. We’ll end our reading at [v. 18](#), but let’s begin back at [v. 9](#) for context.
 - 1. Paul is here sharing something of his story—how he went from persecutor to apostle.
 - 2. And, in this, we’ll catch something of what it means to be a Christian on mission and what we’re really aiming for when we come to others with Christianity’s “[true and rational words](#).”

⁹ “I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

¹² “In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ (Acts 26:9-18)

Three Headings

- A. As we focus in on vv. 16-18 now, I have three main headings under which I'll organize my thoughts: (1) The Midday Appointment; (2) The Essential Task; and (3) The Cascading Effect.
1. I should say up front: I realize that this is Paul's story, and some of these things are unique to him as an apostle and shouldn't be applied wholesale to us.
 2. Even still, I do think the biblical principles that underly all of this are profoundly relevant to us. And so there is much we can take away for ourselves from Jesus' dealings with Paul here.

(1) The Midday Appointment

2 Observations

- A. For this, I'm looking at vv. 15-17 in particular. Let's read them again.
1. Jesus has just dropped Paul, literally, with a vision of his glory—shining brighter, as Luke says, than the midday sun. And Paul is still in the dust, shaken up by what he's encountered.
 2. And Jesus says to him: “¹⁵ I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you . . .”
- B. Now, there are a couple observations I want to make at this point . . .

Observation #1: Jesus Lowers Us and Lifts Us at the Same Time

- A. The crazy thing about the Christian life is that it's both a call to step down and a call to step up at the same time.
- B. So Paul begins all this thinking that he's awesome, thinking that he's right, thinking, I suppose, that he's God's gift to the world. But he's not.
1. He's not just been persecuting Christians, Jesus says.
 2. He's been persecuting Jesus himself, as it were. “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (v. 15). “You're coming at me. You're throwing your stones in the very face of God—even as you claim to be serving God!”
 - a. So he's got to be put in his place.
 - b. He's got to see who God really is and who he really is as well.
 - c. There's a humbling that takes place. A lowering.
- C. But Jesus doesn't just crush us for the sake of crushing us. He crushes us to heal us. He breaks us down to build us up right.

1. We would imagine that after Jesus tells Paul, “You’re persecuting me,” he would then unhesitatingly say: “Therefore, get out of here you scoundrel. I want nothing to do with you.” That’s how you and I would talk.
 2. But that’s not how Jesus talks. What does he say next? Well, the first word of [v. 16](#) there is what? [“But . . .”](#)
 - a. It’s a word that would make my 9-year-old son snicker.
 - b. But, at times, it’s one of the most important words in all the Bible.
 - i. In sovereign grace, God thrusts this word between us and that which we indeed do rightly deserve.
 - (1) We should be cut from the team. We should be cast into hell. We should be set under his wrath for our sin.
 - (2) [“But . . .”](#) we’re not. [“But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you . . .”](#)
 3. He lowers us and he lifts us. Paul’s thrown into the dirt . . . on his face—but then he’s told to rise and stand up . . . on his feet.
- D. I love this. Because I think it comes at both of the extremes we are often prone to.
1. On the one hand, some of us feel like we’re good, like we’ve got it together, like we’re better than others.
 - a. And we need to be humbled, lowered. We need a vision of Christ’s glory that just knocks us back to our place beneath him.
 2. But then, on the other hand, some of us terribly aware of our low estate, our sin, our many mistakes. And we are convinced we could never be of any use to God, or anyone else for that matter. Maybe this is something people have told us through the years and we’ve come to believe it. Maybe it’s something we tell ourselves because of our impressive record of failures—one after the other. Whatever the case, we feel like Paul there in the dirt.
 - a. But to us the voice of Jesus would also come: [“But rise and stand upon your feet . . .”](#) I have a purpose for you, an appointment for you. Get up off the floor!
- E. I think both sides of this really come together in those two words Jesus attaches to Paul there in [v. 16](#): [“\[I am appointing you\] as a servant and witness . . .”](#)
1. Those titles are both humbling and honoring at the same time, aren’t they?
 - a. They are humbling because Paul is called to serve, not his own purposes, but God’s; to tell others, not about his own glory, but God’s.
 - b. And yet they are honoring because he’s getting to do all of this with and for God! He’s been entrusted—we’ve been entrusted—with so much!

F. Jesus lowers and lifts us at the same time. Which side of that do you need most today?

Observation #2: Jesus Sends Us and Delivers Us at the Same Time

A. I found this to be fascinating. I wonder if you noticed it?

B. In the first place we see that Jesus is sending Paul to the Jews and to the Gentiles. “I am sending you . . .,” he says (v. 17).

1. It’s a good reminder to us that to be a Christian is to be a “sent one of God.”
2. In a sense, every Christian is to be a missionary, if not formally, then certainly informally—in everyday life.
 - a. So Charles Spurgeon somewhat scandalously says: “Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor.”
 - b. Tim Keller says: “You are never called into a new relationship with God without being radically sent out into the world to live for others. Every Christian man and woman is a man and woman [on] mission.”
 - c. And, of course, most important of all, Jesus himself says: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21).

3. Here’s how I’d put it: God doesn’t save you just to save you. He saves you to send you.

a. I wonder: to whom is God sending you?

C. But that’s just what we see in the first place. The fascinating part is what Jesus sets right alongside this in the second place.

1. As I put it: Jesus Sends Us and Delivers Us at the Same Time.
2. Or to put it another way: He delivers us from the very people he’s sending us to.

D. Did you see that there in v. 17: “delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you . . .” “I will deliver you from the very people I’m sending you to.”

1. What does that mean? It means that suffering comes along with the sending.
 - a. It’s what Jesus said of Paul to Ananias back in Acts 9:15-16, if you remember: “[H]e is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”
 - b. It’s like what he said earlier to all of his disciples in Matt. 10:16: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves . . .”
2. Suffering comes along with the sending. Because the message we’re sent with, while glorious, is offensive to natural man.

- a. So often they respond, as John Calvin puts it, like “frantic men [railing] upon their physicians.” They don’t want to hear us. They may even want to hurt us.
- E. So we’re going to need this promise from Jesus, to know that he’ll deliver us from the very people he’s sending us to.
- F. But, before even that, we need to get real with ourselves and ask: Are we willing to go with the gospel to others if it means this—if salvation for them means suffering for me? Am I really willing to be his servant, his witness, his missionary, come what may?
 - 1. If I’m honest, it seems like many in our culture today, Christians included, act like staying safe at all costs is the mission of their lives.
 - 2. That’s not what I see here. This is a call to dream, to risk, to suffer for something greater than yourself knowing that you’re ultimately and eternally safe in Jesus!

(2) The Essential Task

To Open Their Eyes

- A. With this we come now to the first part of v. 18, where we see that Jesus is sending Paul to the Jews and the Gentiles to do what? “[T]o open their eyes . . .”
 - 1. As we shall see there are a number of effects that cascade out from this point.
 - 2. But this is where it all starts. This is the essential task: “to open their eyes . . .”
- B. And I just want to acknowledge up front here: in one sense, this is an impossible ask.
 - 1. I can’t make people see. I can’t open the eyes of the spiritually blind.
 - 2. That’s beyond my skillset. That’s above my pay grade.
 - a. I can’t do that in and of myself.
- C. And I think that’s the point.
 - 1. It is impossible for us if we go after it alone.
 - 2. But nothing is impossible for us if we go with God.
- D. Paul, of all people, knew this. Only God’s sovereign grace could open eyes.
 - 1. That’s literally his conversion story, do you remember?
 - a. When the glory of Jesus shines around him, he’s not just knocked to the dirt, he’s struck blind.
 - b. And then, “something like scales fell from his eyes” (Acts 9:18) . . . and he sees—and I mean, this time, he really sees.
- E. So he knows, you can’t just do this to a person. God has to do it.

1. But, nevertheless, there are still things we can and should do towards this end. I'll give you two . . .

#1: We Can Speak to God about Them

- A. In other words, we can pray for the folks we're trying to reach.
- B. In v. 29—after Herod has caught wind of Paul's intentions to convert him and he asks: "[W]ould you persuade me to be a Christian?" (v. 28)—Paul responds: "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 . . ."
 1. The Greek word the ESV translates as "would" there—"I would to God"—it can also be translated (as many other translations do): "I pray to God . . ." (cf. NET, NLT, NIV).
 2. That is to say: "Yes, I'm trying to persuade you to become a Christian Herod. But I know that I will have no success in this endeavor unless God sovereignly works on the eyes of your heart."
 - a. So I'm not just persuading, I'm praying."
- C. Are you praying—for the people in your life that God is sending you to?

#2: We Can Speak to Them about God

- A. The fact that we must be praying is in no way meant to imply that we don't need to be persuading. Paul was doing both!
 1. Yes, we talk with God about them.
 2. But we also talk with them about God.
- B. Because here's the thing: God may not need us, but he is still pleased to use us.
 1. We may not be the first and fundamental cause of someone's salvation, but we may indeed be the critical means—the tool that God chooses to use.
 2. The hammer may not have built the table, but the carpenter did use it to build it.
 3. We may not be ultimate in the matter of someone's salvation, but we are still significant.
- C. That's why even, again, with Paul's story . . .
 1. Jesus doesn't just convert Paul from his place in the clouds and then send him on his way.
 2. There are more details given to us in the other accounts of his testimony. And we know that Jesus first tells Paul to enter the city and wait. And then what? He sends a man by the name of Ananias to him, to pray for him, to minister to him, to talk to him about God.
 - a. And it's only after this encounter, while Ananias is laying hands on Paul, that the scales fall, and his eyes are opened.

D. So, again: God doesn't need you, but he does want to use you.

1. Maybe God wants you to be Ananias for someone in your life.

- a. So talk to God about them,
- b. and talk to them about God.

(3) The Cascading Effect

A. Now we come to the cascade of effects I mentioned that follow when once a person's eyes are opened. Look at how Paul describes it for us in [v. 18](#): "[I'm sending you] to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

B. It seems to me from the rest of Scripture that all of this happens almost instantaneously in conversion, but here they are outlined for us one by one—perhaps so we can appreciate all that God is doing for us when he saves us by his grace.

1. In particular, when once the eyes of your heart are opened, Paul then identifies 2 Turns and 2 Gifts that will come packaged together as a result of that.

2 Turns

Turn #1: From Darkness to Light

A. Do you see that there in [v. 18](#): "[S]o that they may turn from darkness to light" In conversion we travel from the realm of darkness to the realm of light.

B. Why is it that so often, the things that creep about in the dark are always nasty looking? Have you noticed this?

1. Have you seen those nature shows where they take you deep down to the bottom of the ocean floor where no light ever reaches? The creatures down there look like something belched out of hell.
 - a. Anglerfish, oh my goodness, if I was swimming down there and one of those came by, I'd just die on the spot. He wouldn't even have to sink his long needle teeth into me. He'd just have to strike a grin in my direction and I'd die from the sheer terror of it all.
 - i. On the surface, the dolphins are dancing, the otters are playing, the seals are basking in the sun.
 - ii. But down below, these little demon fish are twitching around in the dark like zombies looking for fresh meat.
2. I thought about this recently with regard to squirrels and rats actually.

- a. Squirrels are cute. Sure, they can be a menace in the garden, but they're cute. We actually rescued a baby squirrel a couple weeks ago. We were feeding him and caring for him. We named him. He's so cute.
- b. But rats? Listen, I know some people have pet rats, I hear it, they're smart and all this. But, I don't care. They are not cute. Those things are nasty.
 - i. Squirrel comes by on the fence. We're all good with that. "How cute," someone says.
 - ii. A rat comes by. People are shrieking.
- c. But, really, when you consider it closely, there's not that much difference between a squirrel and a rat.
 - i. It's just that the squirrel has all these round features and a fluffy tail.
 - ii. And rats are more pointed and sharper and they got those nasty long fleshy tails.

(1) Oh and then there's this: squirrels come out in the light of day and rats only come out when its dark.

3. I think there's something to that. The darkness disfigures.

C. But here's the point: Spiritually, some of us have been messing around in the dark lately.

- 1. Maybe you've made a home there.
- 2. Maybe you've got a second home there. When you're not at church, that's where you go—to harbor thoughts you know you shouldn't, to partake of things you know you shouldn't, to let stuff in you know you shouldn't.
 - a. You do that over time and, though you might not see it on the outside right away, inside your soul is disfiguring, distorting, getting all knotted up and twisted.
 - b. And if you could pull back the curtain and look at your heart you'd see it: it's something nasty, it's something frightening, it's something that would make a person shriek . . .
 - i. . . it's something that's spent far too long in the dark.

D. That's where a lot of us were. That's where some of us may still be.

- 1. And one of the things that happens when God is operating on a soul, is the word of the gospel is met with the power of the Spirit, and, as on day one of creation, suddenly light breaks in! ["God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" \(2 Cor. 4:6\).](#)
 - a. You see the beauty of Jesus.

- b. But, not just that, you also see the yuck of your own soul and the stuff that's been growing in the dark around you, within you.
 - i. It just seemed normal when you were in it, but then the lights come on and you say: "This is where I've been hanging out?! The carpets are filthy. There are roaches scattering along the walls. There are rats that have made a nest in my couch. What am I doing here? I want to be in the light."

(1) You turn from darkness to light.

Turn #2: From Satan to God

- A. But Paul continues: "[S]o that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God . . ." (v. 18).
 - 1. Here now we're not just talking about the realms of darkness and light, we're talking about the beings that source them, that superintend them.
 - a. Satan is there in the dark, blinding our minds, keeping us from seeing, Paul would say (2 Cor. 4:4).
 - b. God, on the other hand, is the light of the world, the author of life.
 - 2. So there's a turning from the power of Satan to God.
- B. But what does the power of Satan even look like in your life? It might be helpful to know.
 - 1. A lot of times we have this mistaken notion that it will be obvious to us. We think of demonic possession, foaming at the mouth, cursing the name of Jesus, heads spinning, that sort of thing.
 - a. Clear and apparent evil.
 - b. Sex, drugs, rock and roll.
 - i. And, to be sure, his power does show up like that sometimes . . .
 - 2. But that's just one head of the snake. There are many others and they don't all look nearly so bad. In fact, some even look good. That's why Paul tells us that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).
 - a. I couldn't help but think of that anglerfish again.
 - i. If you've ever seen it, you know it catches its prey down there in the deep dark. It has a light that it dangles over its head, just in front of its mouth.
 - ii. It lures the prey in with something seemingly good and beautiful, and only then does he show his teeth.
- C. So you won't always see it. Sometimes it's subtle.

1. With Adam and Eve all he did was get them to question God's Word a bit: "Did God actually say . . .?" (Gen. 3:1).
 - a. Take up the posture of an analyst or critic or judge. Weigh his words in the scale of your own reason. Seems harmless enough.
 2. With Peter he seems to have convinced him that God was there to put things at ease, make him comfortable—that it could never be God's will for his people to suffer.
 - a. That's why Peter rebukes Jesus when he talked about the cross. God wouldn't do that.
 - b. To which Jesus says what? "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:23). I know that voice. That's not my Father's logic. That's the devil's."
 3. And, of course, with the Jewish leaders that Jesus is clashing with all throughout the Gospels, ironically, Satan had them cleaning up.
 - a. They were solid church folks, ultra-religious.
 - b. But their religion was self-centered and, thus, empty. Jesus says they are "child[ren] of hell" (Matt. 23:15), "[sons of their] father the devil" (John 8:44)—even while they looked so good on the outside.
 4. I think one of the most common ways he exerts power over us is by accusation.
 - a. This is so much a part of his M.O. that the Scriptures give him the nickname: "the accuser of our brothers" (Rev. 12:10).
 - b. Beyond this, I wonder if you realize, in Hebrew, this is actually what Satan means. The "adversary," the "accuser."
 - c. It's not the name his mommy gave him. It's more of a statement about how he functions. He opposes us. He accuses us.
 - i. In many ways, he just tells us what we already know about ourselves, right? We're sinners. We've blown it. He agrees with God on that point. And he loves to drive his claws in on it.
 - ii. But he tries to keep us fixed on that part. He doesn't want us to get to the other side of the gospel. "Look at you. God could never love you."

(1) Oh but he does! We are not just lowered, we are lifted. Yes we are sinners, but we are also so loved!
- D. So to be brought out from under the power of Satan to God is to be delivered from all of these things:
1. Sure, your heart is broken free from the demonic, the Satanic, the sensational and the blatantly sinful.
 2. But, contrary to Adam and Eve, you also start to trust God where you once questioned him.

3. And, contrary to Peter, you stop looking at God like he's butler in the sky—here to make you comfortable and nothing more really. And now you're willing to take up your cross and follow him.
4. And, unlike the Jewish leaders, no longer is your religion so empty. You're not impressed with your own righteousness, nor are you trying to impress others with it. You're impressed by Jesus, and that is all.
5. And, do you know what, you no longer feel so accused and ashamed. The reassuring voice of Jesus is slowly but steadily starting to quiet the accusatory hollers of the devil. Oh Satan still tries to get his claws in you, but Jesus has the stronger—and the softer—hand!

2 Gifts

- A. And this leads to the 2 Gifts. There are two things that Jesus gives to us here, two things that we are to receive freely by grace through faith . . .

Gift #1: Forgiveness of Sins

- A. So [v. 18](#) continues: “. . . that they may receive forgiveness of sins . . .” Oh what a gift!
- B. I thought of that scene in [Zech 3](#) where the prophet describes this vision he has: “¹Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.² And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. [Satan wasn't wrong, he was filthy. There was much he could accuse him of. But the vision isn't over . . .]⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’⁵ And I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments” (vv. 1-5).
1. That's what forgiveness looks like in picture form. You're filthy. And then you're clean.
- C. But I just want to know: Where do the dirty garments go? God takes them, but what does he do with them?
1. I'll tell you what he does with them: He puts them on his Son and Jesus wears them all the way to the cross.
 - a. How did you get clean? You took his clothes, and he took yours.
- D. Every accusation Satan could rightly level against you, is redirected to Jesus. He receives it. He wears it. He carries it. He pays for it. And, in that, he cancels it.
1. So Paul writes in [Col. 2:13-15](#): “¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

- a. I love that last part. Satan had a case against us until the Son went to the cross for us. Now he has nothing left to say.
 - i. Like an anglerfish with no teeth. He can still try to lure you in, but he has no more bite.
 - ii. Christ let the devil sink his teeth into him, so he'd have nothing left to sink into us.

Gift #2: A Place with Him

A. But you don't just get Jesus' clothes. You also get his place with the Father.

- 1. So Paul concludes v. 18: ". . . that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

B. This place is the point of the clothes, don't you see? That's the reason for the wardrobe change.

- 1. Think about it. When you get all dressed up in your nicest outfit, in your slickest suit, it's not just so you can sit around on the couch. It's so you can go out somewhere special.
- 2. Well, in this case, Jesus dresses you up so he can get you back home to God.
 - a. There's a dress code required to step into his holy presence. And none of us can measure up to it. They don't sell what you need at Nordstrom's Rack or Neiman Marcus.
 - b. There's only one who's ever had it. And he gifts it to us to get us in.

C. With this, we return once more to where we began . . .

- 1. We're lowered to the dirt and then we're lifted to the sky.
- 2. We were once at odds with God, but now we have a home with him.
- 3. We were on the outside but now we're brought in.
 - a. Because of Jesus.

D. But, again, why?

- 1. Remember, he doesn't save us just to save us. He saves us to send us.
- 2. Or to put it another way, he brings us in to thrust us out.
- 3. He gives us a place with himself and a purpose in this world.

E. " ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:16-18). So let's go!