

Acts 26:1-29

The Power of Your Story

Image Church // One More Week 4

Introduction

Good morning, Image Family so good to be back with you this weekend!

If you're a guest... **Connection Center**

Exciting days ahead: NEW Space...

This week marks the start of Black History month... I highlight this as a reminder of one of our core values which is **family** and the reality that the family that God has established through Jesus is a beautiful multi-ethnic family! And so, we want to be about living out the reconciling power of the gospel through active unity and love for one another.

- Our aim is first the gospel...
- But our gospel response is unity and the **byproduct** of unity is diversity...

As we look to seek unity it's important to understand the nature of culture and history especially given the dark and destructive past that exists here in America...

- We're putting some resources out in the community group guide that I want to encourage you to lean into to learn and engage more...
- We're trying to enhance our resources to create better engagement and awareness of culture so be on the lookout for more as we seek to love well...

Ok, we're continuing our series called **One More!** And the series is called what it is because this is what we want to be about as a church... We want to be about reaching **one more** person with the gospel!

- We want this to be at the core of who we are...

And what we want to do in this series is lay a foundation for how we do that together... I want you to feel empowered and equip to share the gospel!

- I want to help you live out you're calling to pursue of **one more...**

If you're not a Christian I want to hold up the reality of what we believe for you and why we care about reaching people like you!

If you have your Bibles go ahead and turn to Acts 26...

We're going to be picking up with a guy named Paul who's one of the most catalytic figures in the NT- In fact 13 of the books in the NT were written by him!

This is also the guy that we saw last week who approved of the death of Stephen- the guy that they laid Stephen's cloths at the feet of after he had been killed...

This is a guy with an incredible story that we're going to see in our text this morning...

And here's what we want to do, we want to use Paul's story as a template for engaging people with the gospel...

Let me give you a little context before we jump in...

Paul's been passed along through the court system for a span of about 2 years because they didn't know what to do with the guy. *Crazy right?!*

Paul is currently being held under *Festus a Roman governor* because he's a Roman citizen, but Festus doesn't know what to do with him...

At this point, Paul's just made an appeal to go to Caesar, and Festus has granted that to him...

But then Festus gets a visit from King Agrippa who is the great-grandson of Herod the Great and ruled over the northeastern part of Herod the Great's empire that is a client of Rome...

King Agrippa was also part Jewish, so Festus wants his take...

So, Agrippa and his sister Bernice who's with him want to hear from Paul and so Festus sets it up and that's where we're going to be picking up this morning in **Acts 26 verse 1**...

Let's jump in...

Acts 26:1-29

Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense: **2** "I consider myself fortunate, that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, **3** especially since you are very knowledgeable about all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

4 "All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem.

5 They have known me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived as a **Pharisee**.

Ok, Paul's talks about who he was before that **before he met Jesus**...

He said he was a **Pharisee**... A **Pharisee** is a prominent religious leader... These are people that you would think *get it* when it comes to Jesus but they don't...

See, before Paul encountered Jesus, he **thought** he knew God, he thought he knew what God was like and what God wanted...

- And to him, there was no way that a man *like Jesus* could be the **Messiah**...

See, Paul was expecting the **Messiah** to be a powerful King, born in royalty and riding in on a white horse with a sword slaughtering nations to reestablishing the rule of his people...

Jesus was the opposite of everything Paul was expecting... Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough, his dad was a carpenter.

And instead of coming in as a "king," he said he came in as a servant. And instead of riding in on a white horse, He rode in on a donkey. And instead of carrying a sword to conquered the nations, he took the sword and died for the nations.

See, Jesus was nothing at all like what Paul had expected... **Why?!?**

*Because ultimately, Paul was following after a God that **he wanted to exist¹** instead of following after the God who does exist...

See, Paul followed a **god** that made most sense to him, that was most convenient for him, a god that fit well with his position of power and influence...

Let me apply this to you personally and then practically...

For some of you, you're in the same place Paul was before he met Jesus, you're following after a god that you want to exist...

- A god who let's everyone in...
- A god that grants total freedom...
- A god who exists to serve you only when you need him...
- A god that doesn't infringe on your life or have implications on how you live or how others live...
- A god that doesn't really care about your morality or loyalty to him...

¹ Tim Keller: *Converted by the Resurrection*

And maybe the reason why you're not active in your faith, you're not active in the call God's given to be ambassadors of the gospel is because you've had it all wrong like Paul did...

I wonder how many of you are in a place like Paul before he actually met Jesus?!?

Now, **practically** what can we learn from this when it comes to sharing the gospel??

Many of the people you will be sharing with Christian, will be in a similar situation as Paul before he met Jesus... **Adhering to a god that's a mental construct and not a biblical reality**

This is where a lot of people are... They create their own version of God...

For many they like an ambiguous god because they think it grants them more freedom in-between the lines, but it really increases bondage because there's no clarity on where you really stand...

For others they don't like a god that infringes on their lives, or projects a reality onto the lives of others- they want everyone to be able to find god on their own...

The question is, what do you do with this??

Well, for starters- A god that's defined by you cannot be the god of you... If you are the authority on God, then it makes you god!

A god that is a product of your own mind based on your own viewpoints is not a god that can have power over your life... There's no real benefit to a god that you define...

- There's no hope, there's no, freedom, there's no healing, there's no restoration...
- People long for these things but they have a belief structure that doesn't allow them to have it with any kind of confidence.

One of the best things that you can do is allow the beauty and power of the gospel to speak for itself...

Example: *Gut that cut my hair once...* (Would recommend these questions)

- Do you believe in God? *No*
- Do you think God is the creator? *Yes*
- Ok, do you think God is like you? *No*
- Is God morally superior to you? *Yes*
- Ok, how do you get to Him? *Everyone gets there in their own way...*

I said ok, let me lay it out for you like this... **Gospel from creation to cross...**

He said: *that actually makes sense...*

You want to show people how the God of the bible is greater and more sufficient than the god they have made up in their mind...

I recognize there is more that can be said, and every conversation, every relationship is different, and people are coming from different belief constructs...

I get that, but creation to cross is a good place to start and gives you an idea of where they are based on how this initial conversation goes...

*Let's keep reading in **verse 12** as Paul lays out this encounter with Jesus...*

12 "I was traveling to Damascus under these circumstances with authority and a commission from the chief priests. **13 King Agrippa**, while on the road at midday, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me. **14** We all fell to the ground..."

Watch this, Paul, a guy who stood powerful and mighty, a guy who stood in opposition of God, when he encountered Jesus ended up on his face... ***There was a change in his posture...***

He was humbled... But the beauty of this humbling is that it would end up leading to an incredible hope for Paul not long after this when sees and believes Jesus for who He is...

Here's what I want you to see: ***when you truly encounter Jesus, it takes you knees...***

- You are humbled as you see the magnitude of who God is
- You are humbled because of the sin in your life...

But it's that ***humility*** that gives way to an incredible ***hope!*** As you see what God's extended to you through Jesus!!!

And listen- you don't graduate from your humility; ***you go lower in it*** the more you see the vastness of what the gospel means for your life...

You are no longer on the throne of your life, but you are on your face before the throne of God...

And here's the thing, from then on, it's a ***continual*** posture that you stay in... It is a posture of surrender where He is Lord, and you're not...

The question for some of you is, have you truly encountered Jesus?

- And the way that you can tell the answer to this question is ***by who's Lord of your life...***
- Functionally, not verbally...
 - Not through religion...
- Not through knowledge...
 - James 2:19 ***You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder.***
 - The divide is their lack of their surrender not their lack of knowledge!

- It's one thing to say it, it's another thing for the posture of your life to reflect it!

May be why you're not actively sharing the gospel because it has been a statement you claim but not a person you're surrendered to!

Ok, practically: You're going to encounter people who are here, A statement of faith rather than surrender in faith

This is one of the greatest disconnects...

You say ***ok, what do I do with that when I am talking to someone, and they have this disconnect between acknowledgment and surrender??***

You show them the beauty and benefit of surrender!

*You don't have to argue against their view of God, you can hold up the beauty of who YOU know God to be, and what that means for you and for them!

Don't hold up the law and say conform this is how you have to live... Hold up the beauty of gospel and the implications it has on their lives...

You want to help them see the goodness of God through Jesus and what has saved them from... And what He has saved them to!!
Every person struggles with guilt and shame for things that they have done... We are born with an awareness of morality that comes from our creator... Every person knows to a degree that they are immoral...

Some people live in shame, others cope with their immorality by diving further in... Some people try to block it out or justify it but they know it's there...

What you want them to see is that in the midst of their immorality God offers forgiveness and freedom...

- **Romans 8:1** Therefor there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus...

God demonstrates love and extends forgiveness... **Romans 5:8** But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God erases your sin and frees you of guilt and shame...

- New life and new identity...
- The greater God's grace, the greater the surrender...

And not only what Jesus saved them from, but what He saved them to!

- His Kingdom
- His Family

A Son of the King, a daughter of the King, should reflect their daddy!

- They say: *No one is perfect...*
- No one is talking about perfection- really just talking about the posture of your life that's marked by what the bible calles repentance...
 - **Repentance...**

Do you see the King for who He is and what He's extended to you??

The son or daughter of a king participates in the things of their father... They embody the things he embodies...

You cannot claim to be a son or daughter of the King and reject everything the King is about!?!?

Let's keep going...

Verse 14: [And then, Paul says] I heard a voice speaking to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

15 [Paul] asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"And the Lord replied: 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. **16** But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. **17** I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them **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 share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Here's something else that we see here through Paul's story... Going to highlight a few things moving specifically for you Christian...

Paul was one of the greatest enemies of the church—a murder, a crusader against the people of God— would become arguably the greatest missionaries of all time!

Listen to me, 1. your past sin doesn't disqualify you from God's grace or his ability to use you!

Let me as you this, what's making you feel disqualified today?

Listen, if you're here today, and you're feeling like you don't measure up, or that God can't use you, you need to know that you're exactly who God wants to use...

See the Gospel is that you could never measure up, which is why Jesus had to come and measure up for you... Jesus lived the perfect life in your place, and then died the death that was meant for you... And then Jesus **beat death** in His resurrection offering new life to those who will believe!

Paul would go on to write later to say in **1 Timothy 1:15b-16:** "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of

them. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might **demonstrate** his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life.

God uses Paul to demonstrate who He is to the world... Paul was a walking testimony of God's grace for the world to see...

Pastor JD, says it like this: *Those things that make you bad are the very things God intends to use as instruments of redemption! Sometimes the sin you struggle with and the pain you go through make you uniquely qualified to speak redemption to others in the same condition.*²

Do you see yourself as an instrument that God can use for redemption?!?!?

Jump down to **verse 24** and look what happens...

24 As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus exclaimed in a loud voice, "You're out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad."

25 But Paul replied, "I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I'm speaking words of truth and good judgment.

26 For the king knows about these matters, and I can speak boldly to him. For I am convinced that none of these things has escaped his notice, since this was not done in a corner. **27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe."

Love this...

28 Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?"

Look at Paul's goal here... He says:

29 "I wish before God," replied Paul, "that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am—except for these chains."

Do you see Paul's heart here?!?

And in the process of living out his desire for the advancement of the gospel Paul was willing to **endure** for the sake of the gospel...

2. Being an ambassador of Jesus is not easy but it's worth it

It is going to take you to uncomfortable places like it did for Paul...

Now the good news is that you're not going to jail- you won't be killed... your suffering for the gospel will be significantly less than Paul's or others in the NT...

But you will still experience discomfort, you may be rejected, you may be shut down, it may change a relationship once you finally share the hope that you have...

- Flesh out...

Ok... now, let's zoom out...

I want you to see the reality of what happened here... Paul could have said anything, he could have given any defense- he could have backed out...

But instead, he shares his story this is something Paul does often because **He understand that his story, points to God's redemptive story...**

I want to talk about: The power of your story

Example: Attention E-House... pet awareness week...

- Everyone loves a good story!

The difference is that yours is true!

You say but bro you don't know how jacked up my story is... **So many of you are ashamed of your past rather than leveraging your past!**

² JD Greear: Sermon; Acts 9:1-19 SENT #12

Do you understand that your story points to God's redemptive story??

Do you know your story??

- Write it out...
- Can you articulate it?
- Might need to take time in CG to share your story?

When is the last time you shared your story??

- Question: if you won the lottery would you share it??

How to leverage your story to point to God's redemptive story

Do you see how much we got out of Paul's story today? Well there's a lot that people can learn from your story!

*Here's something cool: This is not the first time that Paul's shared his story, but it is the time that we get this version...

- He's contextualizing...

The same is true with how you share your story...

Teach about how to contextually use your story... Use my story as an example...

- Religious
- Rebel

Conclusion [VAMP]

There is power in your story... Will you be faithful to share it?!?

For some of you, your story needs to start this morning...

For others of you, you need to remember your story- you've forgotten the goodness of God... You've been sitting on your hands squandering the story God has written on your life...