I STAND HERE TO TESTIFY ABOUT JESUS

Acts 26:1-32

Key Verses: 26:29

**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.”**

Paul had testified about Jesus in different places since he arrived in Jerusalem. Paul was passionate to share his faith in Jesus’ resurrection before his fellow Jews and the religious leaders. However, they all rejected Paul’s testimony and they were about to kill Paul. God protected Paul and led Paul to the Roman governors, Felix and Festus to be tried. In today’s passage, Paul stands before King Agrippa for another trial. At this point, we realize that Paul was not trying to defend himself; he was making those opportunities to testify about Jesus in the courses of his trial. Let us learn from today’s passage, Paul’s solemn desire to testify about Jesus.

1. I am on trial because of my hope (1-18)

Look at verse 1. **When King Agrippa said, “You have permission to speak for yourself,” So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense”** Now Paul had permission to defend himself before a king, Agrippa. We know the family history of Agrippa. His great-grandfather had tried to kill the baby Jesus; his grandfather had John Baptist beheaded; his father had the First apostle, James martyred. Agrippa’s forefathers worked as Satan’s agents against the church and the people of God. Then how did Paul acknowledge Agrippa? Paul said he considered himself fortunate to stand before the king. In other words, Paul was happy to speak before Agrippa. It was because Paul was pleased to preach the gospel to high officials, the Roman governor and the king. It was the fulfillment of his calling as Acts 9:15 states; “**But the Lord said to Ananias,** **‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.’”** God has been faithful with Paul to keep his promise from the very beginning of his calling for God’s mission. Paul was given an opportunity to defend himself but Paul was actually making this chance to proclaim the name of Jesus to the king and his high officials. There are some points that Paul mentioned in his testimonial defense.

**First, the hope in Jesus’ resurrection**. In verses 4-8, Paul states his credentials as a faithful Jew before his conversion, and reminds Agrippa that he is still walking in faithful fulfillment of the promise which was made by God to Jewish forefathers. Paul also described his hatred of Christianity before his conversion, and his zealous persecution of Christians.

Then Paul said in verse 6, **“And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today.** Once again, he testified that it was because of his hope of resurrection he was on trial, as he had done in three previous trials before the fellow Jews, the Sanhedrin, and Felix. This time, however, he testified that this hope of resurrection was also the hope of his Jewish brothers. He said in verses 7-8: **“This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”** Paul knew the sin of his accusers who were not aware of God’s promise to their ancestors regarding the hope of the resurrection. Paul was also pointing to the sin of limiting God’s mighty power who can raise Jesus from the dead.

Here Paul was mentioning Jesus’ resurrection again and again even though his listeners had no ears to hear the message of the gospel. The reason was that the hope in Jesus’ resurrection is the key in the gospel message. Why did the religious leaders become so upset about hearing Jesus’ resurrection? It was simply because they didn’t want to believe it no matter how truthful the evidence was to be provided for them. As we know, they were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion. They turned Jesus over to the Roman governor to be executed. Jesus was crucified and they thought that their problem of Jesus was gone forever. But if Jesus came back to life, it was turned out to be true that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Then they were in big trouble with God who raised Jesus from the dead. So they tried to suppress the truth about the resurrection of Jesus and tried to stop Paul from spreading the hope in Jesus’ resurrection.

The religious leaders and some of the Jews were acting exactly like Satan’s agents. The devil does not want people to hear the message of resurrection so that people remain unforgiving, heading to the way of perishing. So he uses all means to stop the gospel workers from spreading the words of hope in the resurrection of Jesus. Yet how irony it was. Paul was ready to die for the name of Jesus. He didn’t try to spare his life. He went to Jerusalem and boldly testified the name of Jesus in the temple where he might be killed. 40 people made a pledge not to eat and drink until they killed Paul. Paul was alone, surrounded by murderers, accusers and enemies of God wherever he went. However, God protected him perfectly and whenever Paul had a chance to speak he spoke about the hope in Jesus’ resurrection.

**Second, I was obsessed with persecuting the church of God.** Paul said in verse 9, **“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”** Paul understood the Jews who rejected Jesus because Paul himself was a murderer and persecutor of God’s church. Before his conversion, his only consuming thought was to crush the Christians. He obtained the authority of the chief priests so that he could put many of Christians in prison. He was in charge of killing Stephen who was stoned to death. He was so obsessed with persecuting them that he even hunted them down in foreign cities (11).

So why was Paul telling his BC life story? Paul himself was like one of the Jewish religious leaders who accused Paul and wanted to get rid of the church of God. Before his conversion, Paul was even worse than those religious people. Paul was trying to convince king Agrippa that Jesus rose from the dead and the risen Jesus changed him from the persecutor to the witness of Jesus’ resurrection.

Now in his third part of testimony, he vividly testifies how the risen Jesus appeared to him and changed his life in verses 12-15. This story is repeated in Acts three times—Luke’s narrative in Acts 9, Paul’s testimony before the Sanhedrin in Acts 22, and today’s passage. Paul’s personal encounter with the Risen Jesus was his main topic to testify about Jesus. Without this fact, it was impossible to explain Paul’s change from the persecutor to the witness. Paul was well equipped with the scriptures to convince the unbelieving Jews with gospel faith. Yet his true power in his testimony came from his personal encounter with Christ. To Paul, the risen Jesus was living in his heart ever since he came to Christ, and this conviction made him a powerful and convincing witness of Jesus’ resurrection. The contents of his message were little different according to the listeners as he went through the first, the second and the third missionary journeys. However when he spoke about the hope in the kingdom of heaven, he must have been fully convinced by his personal encounter with the risen Jesus. Paul testified the risen Jesus boldly to everyone based on the true story that he encountered with the Lord. So Paul was testifying the same story to the Jews, the governors, high officials and to king Agrippa at that moment. It does not matter who the audiences are. Our personal encounter with the Lord is the most powerful testimony to convince the unbelieving people.

In our group Bible study, we had some time to discuss how we can explain about the Messiah to this unbelieving generation. We can learn from Paul that we testify what we saw and heard from our Lord Jesus personally. Personal encounters with Jesus will vary depending on persons. Some may meet Jesus dramatically just like Paul in this passage. Some may experience Jesus’ presence as they walk in the faith on a daily basis. The point is that we tell and share our personal knowledge and experience about our Lord Jesus with others. When I was a second year university student, my heart was filled with a desire to share the gospel with one of my friends. I didn’t have much knowledge in the Bible but I couldn’t deny that Jesus was living in me and the Spirit of God compelled me to share this wonderful Savior to people around me. He was on his way back home walking on the street. I stopped him in order to bring him to the church. The only sentence I remember telling him was that Jesus is alive and it is so good to believe in him. I testified Jesus in this way for about a half hour but he hardened his heart and rejected my invitation again and again. Though I failed to invite him on that day, I was still happy to share Jesus with him.

The time we are in is not much different from Paul’s time in this passage. Many people are ignorant about the hope in the kingdom of heaven and some are hostile against our Christian faith. Hence we face many rejections and indifferences as we try to testify our faith to the unbelieving people. However, our labor of witnessing must be continued regardless of people or situation. Paul testified Jesus in the same way of sharing his own testimony to the people of different gender, social status and nationality.

How will you tell about Jesus, the Messiah, in our time? The risen Jesus is living in our hearts and we are to tell about his wonderful story of salvation to this generation. May God use us as powerful witnesses of Jesus as we know Jesus more and more in our personal faith.

Look at verse 16. **“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me.”** Paul was commissioned to be a servant and a witness. First, he was to be a servant of the things which he had seen, and of the things which Jesus would reveal to him. The commission of the Christian is not to make the message or his testimony which serve him; he is called to serve the message of his master. Second, Paul was called to be a witness of those things. The commission of the Christian is not to create experience or create the message, but to witness it and experience it.

Right now, as he stands before Agrippa, Paul is being obedient to this command of Jesus. Throughout the courses of his missionary journey, Paul as a servant and a witness devoted himself to honour and proclaim the name of Jesus alone.

Verses 17 and 18 tell us the reason why Jesus called and appointed Paul as his servant. **“I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”** These are the blessings for those who accept Paul’s message. They will become the children of God being sanctified in Jesus’ forgiving grace.

2. You may become what I am (19-32)

Look at verse 23. **“that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”** This is the conclusion of his testimony proclaiming that Jesus is the suffering Messiah yet rose from the dead bringing the message of light to all people. Paul was standing to defend himself but Paul actually testified to the Messiah. Now it was time for both Festus and Agrippa to respond to Paul’s message either to believe or not.

Look at verse 24. **“‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted. ‘Your great learning is driving you insane.’”** Festus couldn’t hear Paul’s message any more so he interrupted Paul. The Roman governor couldn’t understand why Paul used this opportunity to talk about resurrection and the forgiveness of sins instead of trying to save himself. Paul’s message didn’t not make sense to him as well.

Then what did Agrippa respond to the gospel message? Look at verse 28. **“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”** Agrippa knew Paul's intention not to defend himself but to testify the resurrection of Jesus. However, he neither believed the message of hope in the Kingdom of heaven. Paul replied to him verse 29, **“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.”** In the human perspective, Paul should have asked his innocence before the king and the governor in his case. But he was more concerned for the salvation of these people than for the removal of his own chains. So Paul was asking all listeners of his message to be like him. It was Paul’s desire and prayer for them to receive the true blessing of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven, living freely from the power of sin and death.

Paul’s last statement teaches us who the truly blessed are. The grace of forgiveness and salvation is given to all people who listen and accept the message of the gospel. They are the people who live under God’s guidance and protection to live as Jesus’ witnesses. Let us testify Jesus in our time with clear evidence of our personal encounter with him so that the unbelieving become Christians like us.