

**Sermon Manuscript: Acts 26:19-29**  
***The Testimony of God's Truth***  
Second Sunday of Easter – April 11, 2021

The celebration of Easter is not just one Sunday. The church calendar set aside a week of Sundays for the celebration of our Lord's resurrection. During the remaining six Sundays in the Easter season, we will be following the theme "The Resurrection Life." The emphasis will be on how our Lord Jesus' resurrection from the dead impacts our life every day. We will do this on the basis of accounts from the book of Acts which take the place of lessons from the Old Testament during these Sundays. Some of the stories may be relatively unfamiliar to you but they show us how the believers in the time immediately after Jesus' resurrection were impacted by that most important event.

One of the first issues that those early believers wrestled with was being certain of Jesus' resurrection and what it meant for them. Our account today comes near the end of the book of Acts. It records a part of the trial of the Apostle Paul before King Herod Agrippa and the Roman Governor Festus. It is found in Acts 26 where we read:

*"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen — that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."*

*At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."*

*"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."*

*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 God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." [NIV]*

Jesus had foretold the kind of situation that Paul found himself in when he said: *You will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. [Luke 21:12-13]* Like our brother Paul, we all will have times when we are called upon to be witnesses to our Savior and what he has done for us. The trouble is that those we witness to may treat our testimony with contempt. We often will not be successful in convincing them of the truth. But like Paul, we cannot let that keep us from giving **THE TESTIMONY OF GOD'S TRUTH**.

### **1. To Unbelieving Hearts**

Bill Murray, the comedian, once said, "It's hard to win an argument with a smart person, but it's near impossible to win an argument with a stupid person." What Murray meant was that when you argue

with a smart person, they are able and willing to look at the argument from more than one point of view. A truly smart or wise person understands that they may not know everything or that they may be misinformed and are willing to be corrected. In contrast, the stupid or unwise person either is unable or refuses to see the other side of the debate. Another way to say what Murray was trying to get across would be to point out that you can reason with a smart person. The unwise person will simply remain unreasonable.

It would seem pretty obvious that people who has risen to positions in government like King Herod Agrippa or Governor Festus were not stupid. They surely did not lack intelligence. Yet as they listened to Paul's testimony, they concluded that Paul must be crazy. Governor Festus shouts at him, "*You are out of your mind, Paul!*" [verse 24] Festus is responding to Paul's declaration that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead.

Let's back up a little and talk about how and why Paul came to be on trial. He had made three missionary journeys through Asia Minor and Greece. On the third journey he and his companions had collected money to help relieve the Christians in Judea who were suffering during a famine. Paul had traveled to Jerusalem to deliver the help and when he was there he went to the temple to worship. While he was there he was spotted by some Jews who recognized him from his travels. They incited a riot against him and Paul was taken into protective custody by the Roman authorities. The next day he spoke before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious governing council. When he spoke about Jesus and the resurrection from the dead it resulted in a tremendous uproar that threatened Paul's life. Eventually he came to be on trial before the secular court.

Neither Agrippa and Festus nor the Jewish religious leaders were willing to listen to what Paul had to say. Paul was unable to convince them by the argument of his testimony about Jesus. Paul could not win this argument because they were spiritually stupid people. They were like the fool that the David describes: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile.* [Psalm 19:1] As Paul had written to the Corinthians: *No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* [1 Corinthians 12:3] It wasn't that any of these people were unintelligent. The problem was that they already had their mind made up in their sinful unbelief. They were unwilling to believe the testimony of God's truth. They were unwilling to believe in Jesus as the risen Savior. It is sin that makes people stupid in this way.

## 2. To My Own Heart

Paul certainly understood this. For much of his life he had been stupid in this way. Earlier in his testimony to Agrippa and Festus he had talked about the time before he became a believer in Jesus. He had rounded up Christians and put him in prison. He had given approval to the execution of martyrs like Stephen. It wasn't until Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus that the unbelieving stupidity of his heart was broken so that it could be changed and he would believe in Jesus. Jesus said to him, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads ... I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*" [Acts 26:14-15] When he was confronted with the testimony of God's truth, the Holy Spirit was able to win the argument and Paul was able to see things in a completely different way.

There are two things that we need to take away from this. The first has to do with our own hearts and what we can learn from the history of Paul's life. Before he met Jesus on the road, he was a very religious, upright pious man. He thought he had it all figured out. Years earlier he was one of the Pharisees who had been a member of the same Sanhedrin that was trying to put him to death. He was a

highly educated and intelligent man like Festus and Agrippa. Festus even refers to Paul's great learning. But none of that did him any good. In fact, it made things worse for him because it was part of the reason why he was spiritually stupid. In his arrogance and self-righteousness he didn't think Jesus had anything to offer him. Instead he opposed the proclamation about Jesus in every way possible.

The question we need to ask ourselves is whether or not we have the same stupid mindset. Do we think that we already know everything there is to know about being a Christian? Is Bible study of very low priority for us – or maybe no priority at all? Are we too stubborn and foolish to admit that we might not know everything and that the attitudes and beliefs in our hearts may have been more influenced by our sinful nature and the sinful world than by the testimony of God's truth? Does the Holy Spirit need to come and knock us flat to the ground like he did Paul on the road to Damascus? Does he need to go to such extremes to knock sense into our sin-addled hearts and minds? Make no mistake. Sin makes us spiritually foolish and stupid. And just because you got confirmed once doesn't mean that sin's stupefying influence has ended. Pray that the Holy Spirit would open our hearts and open our ears so that we might be willing to listen to the truth about ourselves. May he open our eyes to see clearly his truth rather than remain in the darkness of our own prejudices and unbelief.

The second thing we need to understand here is how spiritual stupidity and blindness is at work in the people we try to tell about Jesus. Do you have members of your family or close friends that you wish will come to church? Maybe they at one time were active in church. Maybe you have children who have drifted away. You try talking to them but it doesn't seem like you ever make any headway. Our pleas are like the one that Paul makes here to Agrippa. He says, "*Do you believe the prophets (the word of God)? I know that you do!*" [verse 27] Agrippa's response was to say that Paul could not so quickly persuade him to become a Christian. From his own experience Paul knew how stupid people can be. That's why he says with confidence to Agrippa, "*Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am.*" [verse 29] In the same way we must be patient and persistent with the people to whom we give the testimony of God's truth. Sin's influence makes them spiritually stupid in the same way that it has worked in us. The truth is that there is only one "argument" that will win the day.

### 3. What Is "True and Reasonable"

To the unbelieving heart and to the heart that has been blinded by sin's stupidity, the testimony of God's truth concerning our sin, Jesus' sacrifice for that sin and the miracle of his resurrection from the dead seems to be crazy. People will find all kinds of reasons not to believe it. It doesn't make scientific sense. It doesn't fit with my philosophy of life. I don't have time for it. Doesn't it take away my freedom to do what I want? The list could go on. The fact is that people who already have their minds made up will not see the truth even if it is right in front of their face. Or as Paul said: *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.* [1 Corinthians 2:14]

The only thing that can change a spiritually stupid, blind, unbelieving heart is the power of the gospel – the testimony of God's truth. As Paul had written to the Romans: *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.* [Romans 1:16] All people, including you and me, need to recognize our sin before God. We need to realize that there is nothing we can do to overcome it. It is by the testimony of God's truth in his law that we are so convicted of sin. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* [Romans 3:23]

Then once convicted, all people, including you and me, need to hear the good news that Jesus died and rose again to free us from our condemnation. ... *and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* [Romans 3:24] This was Paul's mission as he tells Festus and Agrippa: *First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God.* [verse 20]

Paul declares that what he is saying is true and reasonable. It is true because it comes from God. God has made his testimony very plain and believable because of all of the witnesses that have seen what he has done. The culmination of all of this is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The power displayed on Easter and the many witnesses to Christ being alive attest to the truth of God's testimony.

The reasonableness is found in the results of Christ and the testimony about him. It had the power to change the lives of people like Paul and all those early Christians. They boldly witnessed to God's truth and were willing to even face prison and death. It has changed your life and mine. Where would we be without the peace that comes from knowing our sins are forgiven? Where would we be without the comfort that comes from knowing that death is defeated so we don't need to fear it? Where would we be without the confidence that comes from knowing that Christ our Good Shepherd holds us in his gracious hands? In what other possible way could God have accomplished the saving of the whole world from the destruction of sin other than the way that is revealed in the true and reasonable testimony of his truth?

#### **4. To Remove "These Chains"**

The truth of God's testimony about Jesus is something that everyone in the world absolutely needs. None of the philosophies, science, social structures or good intentions of sinful and blind human beings can rescue us from death. Only Christ in his resurrection can make any difference. The secular world and the religious establishment of Paul's day told him that he was out of his mind. The people all around us in our world for the most part do not see the need for Christ either. The only thing that can change them is the testimony of God's truth. The only thing that can break the chains of death and hell is our risen Jesus.

Like Paul, let us boldly testify to the truth of God. They may say our words are insane at times. Or they may just think that they are of no real value. But let us keep speaking those words because the Holy Spirit will use their power to give sight to the spiritually blind and wisdom to the spiritually stupid.

And let us not restrict our testimony to just words. Let people see how God's truth and his grace in Christ have impacted our lives. Let people see the joy, comfort, love for one another, patience and perseverance in trouble as well as all the other gifts that result from belonging to Christ. Like Paul, may our prayer be that all people who hear (and see) God's testimony through us might become what we are. We are God's rescued and beloved children because of the resurrection of Christ.

It is the testimony of God's truth that defeats doubt for us. It gives us saving faith in Jesus. And it is that same testimony of Christ that is the only thing that can defeat the doubts of those whose faith is weak or who are still gripped by unbelief. May we be given the grace to always give the testimony of God's truth. Amen.