

I want you to think about what a difference a speech can make. A speech can drive people to wars, a speech can rally people against slavery or a speech can help someone win an election. But as I am sure you are aware the average person is uncomfortable with giving speeches. One of my favourite Seinfeld quotes is this "According to most studies, (P) people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy." Although that is stretching the truth, I do think that it is something that we as Christians especially struggle with, the idea of publically speaking about our faith. But as Christians we are called to be prepared to always have an answer for what we believe in. We need to be ready to tell others about our faith and the certain hope that we have in Christ Jesus. It says this in 1Peter (P)

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Pe 3:15 (NIV)

We need to be ready to show and tell others about our faith, and the certain hope that we have in Christ Jesus. That's why we have been doing the welcoming and the just start talking courses. And for the next 2 weeks in our sermons we are going to look at examples of giving a testimony. This week we are going to look at a testimony that Paul gives in Acts 26 and next week Bruce is going to look at 2 ways to live.

Let me give you some background of what we are looking at in Acts. Firstly I would like to really encourage you to read the book of Acts. Its the sequel to the book of Luke and it continues on from where we finished Luke last week. Luke begins his sequel in Acts with some last instructions from Jesus to the disciples, Jesus says this 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you

will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Ac 1:8 (NIV). The book of Acts shows how the disciples fulfil this mission. It is a very challenging and very encouraging book.

Well after the introduction the disciples receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost but they don't start spreading the word much beyond Jerusalem and Judea. It is only when they start getting persecuted by the Jews that they start spreading out. In the beginning persecution was being arrested or being beaten up, but soon after, persecution meant death for Christians, we see the first death with Stephen in Acts 7. Moving on in Acts, we see Paul getting converted and he starts to preach to the gentiles, to the ends of the earth people. And it is not too long before Paul is being persecuted too. A few chapters back from the passage that we read today, the Pharisees have arrested him because he proclaims that the dead Jesus (whom they murdered) is now alive. and Paul has been in Jail for 2 years without trial. Finally Festus the new Roman governor hears Paul's case, because the Jews have asked him to send Paul to Jerusalem so that they can kill him. He hears Paul's defense and because Paul is a roman citizen he asks to be sent to Caesar, rather than be sent to the Jews. Agrippa the King of the area and his wife come to visit Festus, and they too want to hear Paul's case.

So Paul, now standing before Festus the Roman governor, King Agrippa and his wife, and others is asked to defend himself. Now instead of directly defending himself or just giving the evidence to show that Jesus had risen from the dead, he chooses to give his testimony. You see he uses this opportunity to not only answer their accusation but to also show and tell what God has done for him. Also note that as Paul starts he is respectful, he doesn't angrily or disrespectfully speak to his captors, Instead like it says in 1 Peter he is respectful and happy to share the gospel.

So what does Paul's testimony look like? (P) Is there a structure there which we can learn from? I think there is. I think his testimony can be broken into 3 parts and I want to look at each of these in turn. First (P) he starts by describing his life before Jesus, his history, then second, (P) he describes the change in his life, when he met Jesus, and finally (P) he describes his life now and how he is living his new life.

So to start with Paul describes what his life was like, his history. (P) Paul speaks of his time as a Pharisee, how he grew up believing the same thing that some of his audience did. Like the other Pharisees he believed that God would raise people from the dead. But also like the Pharisees he was convinced that Jesus should die. He was convinced that saints, that is Christians should be put in prison or killed.

Now it may seem an unusual place for Paul to start by saying these things, but by dealing with what he was, he achieves a number of goals. Firstly he connects with his audience, they can see themselves in the same position, they can start to relate to Paul. We can do the same thing when we give our testimony, we can show people that we were not different to them. We don't have to go into all the details of how we lived in the past, glorifying our sin, but we also don't want to give off a holier than you attitude. We were just like them, sinners. We all have a story about our sin. You may have been raised up in the most religious home in town, but we are all sinners who need to be saved by the amazing grace of God. So when you give your testimony, explain your life before you became a christian. I grew up in a Christian home, with Christian parents, going to church and going to a Christian school. I would consider myself a Christian from a very early age. But as I was growing up, I think a lot of my faith was not necessarily lived out. I knew, but I didn't necessarily live. Instead of fully trusting God I would often trust myself. If I had an exam, an assignment or was worried about getting a girlfriend, I would rely on myself to solve the problems rather than trust God and pray or read the bible. Whether we have had a

criminal past or a more normal life, we have all been sinners and should be able to show our need for God.

The second section of Paul's speech is about the cause of the change (P) in his life. Paul tells the story of how he was persecuting the Christians and how on one occasion when he was on his way to Damascus Jesus appeared before him and challenged him with what he was doing wrong. Jesus told Paul that he needed to change and tell others. Now we today don't often have such a direct message from Jesus, though there are Muslims in Ramadan that speak of having dreams of Jesus and then become christian, instead, we today, will more often hear Jesus speaking to us through the bible and through other Christians. The bible and our Christian friends challenge us with what we are doing wrong and then point us to the right direction. As I said before I was going to church and knew about the bible, but didn't necessarily live like I believed. I used to wish that something like what happened to Paul would have happened to me. That I would have a clear dramatic change in my life. But I have changed my mind on that. The truth is that there are a lot of less traumatic and painful ways for the Lord to get our attention. I hope I don't have to get knocked to the ground and struck blind for the Lord to get my attention! There are some less traumatic ways: How about by seeing someone else's life turned around by the Lord? Maybe the Lord could get your attention by bringing a special blessing into your life: a new friend or a new baby. For me

One weekend away I was challenged to think of all my sin and what I had done wrong and as I sat there I realised i had done a lot wrong and that I couldn't fix it. As much as I relied on myself to get good grades or succeed in life, I knew I couldn't fix my sin. Then we read (P) Romans 3 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that

came by Christ Jesus. Ro 3:22-24 (NIV) Through that bible verse I was reminded that I could not trust only in myself I needed to trust God to save me.

The final section of Paul's speech focuses on what his life is like now. What he is doing now with Jesus as his King? And the simple answer is that he is following what Christ has told him. He has been doing what Jesus had told his disciples to do in 1:8 go to Jerusalem, Judea and the whole world. Paul talked about his life as a Christian now. What is the Lord doing in your life today? Your current walk with God is really important in a testimony because It shows that this change has affected you and it is not just a baptism thing or a one off change in your life. It is also worth noting that it doesn't mean because of your new life that you are now perfect and that don't need God any more. On the contrary Paul says that he has had Gods help to this day and it is the same for us.. For me and my story it means that I now try to trust in God more, I pray more, I read the bible more and not rely on myself. It is very liberating and comforting to know that I can lay every burden, every problem that I have on Jesus.

So that's Paul's speech and his testimony, history, change and new life. That is what we can copy in our testimonies today. But rather than finish here and say thats what you need to do, I want to look at the rest of this chapter as well as I think it still has much to tell us.

Firstly what are the peoples reactions to Paul's testimony? The Roman governor Festus responds by shouting at Paul saying "You're out of your mind, all your knowledge has made you insane!" This is a reaction I know Christians can get when they become Christians, their old friends wonder whether or not they have lost their mind, and it is also something that we deal with from people exploring Christianity, and even atheists, people like Richard Dawkins who criticize the rationality of Christianity.

But Paul answers saying that what he said is true and reasonable, that all these events that I Paul have mentioned, that have taken place out in the open, it was not hidden in a corner, it is a part of history.

Going back to the beginning of my talk, I said that speeches are capable of being very powerful, influencing many people. An interesting thing to note, is that on the surface of Paul's speech no one seems to have been converted. In fact Agrippa challenges Paul as to whether he expects people to become Christian just because they heard his speech. Paul responds by saying that he prays to God that they will become Christian. We need to realise that even though we should be ready to speak about Christ, it is not our words that convict people to become Christian, it is only God who can change people's hearts. A study of Christians showed that 9 out of 10 believers who try to explain their beliefs come away feeling like a failure. We shouldn't. We are told in the bible to be ready to respond, it is God who will convert people. And as Paul says, it may take a short time or a long time.

And who should we give our testimony to? Paul's testimony in this case was to King Agrippa and Festus the Governor, these were people who had kept him in prison for 2 years. King Agrippa's father had James one of the disciples killed and tried to kill Peter. They were Paul's enemies, people we would expect for him to hate. Yet he says that he wants to see them become Christian. It is the same for us. We should be wanting everyone to be saved. Now for some this can be a real problem, some people here in Australia are persecuted for their faith and do have enemies? But for most of us the hardest people to share our testimony is with our family and friends, people who we care deeply about, and don't want to break our relationship with. I would encourage you to try, to look for those opportunities where you can share your faith, but I would also remind you of Paul's statement that it is God's work that will bring them to Christ and it may take a short or a long time.

We have looked at the how of a testimony, history, change, new life, we have looked at the who to give a testimony to, everyone and who should we rely on, God, but finally I want to look at the why, why did Paul give this speech, why do we do testimonies, what is the point of a testimony. Acts 1 says that we are to be witnesses to the world on behalf of Jesus. When Jesus appeared to Paul he said (P) in verse 17 and 18 that he is sending Paul to open the gentile's eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins. And finally Paul himself says what he is preaching, he says (P) in verse 23 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." Ac 26:23 (NIV). Paul is not speaking for his freedom, or for his comfort, but he is speaking for Christ. We give testimonies not to highlight us, but to spread the hope the good news that Christ died and rose again. We give testimonies to focus on Christ.

Amen