

Acts 26:9-26:29

OPEN: ([<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP4r4sXmqmo>] - from "time marks" 4:48 to 8:45.

We opened the sermon with this video cut from a CBN TV interview with Phil and Kay Robertson. After we played the clip, I entered the auditorium dressed in camouflage hunting gear. After reading the text and praying the opening prayer I began to preach the sermon)

One of the things that caught my attention in that interview we played was Phil Robertson's comment: "My life was spiraling out of control in a hurry. It's literally what Jesus said, 'from darkness to light.'"

And I thought "darkness to light? When did Jesus say that?

Well, right here in Acts 26:17b-19 Jesus says to Paul:

"...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 words are our battle cry as Christians.

These words represent our objectives in the war for the hearts and minds of men and women.

- We are called to open peoples' eyes
- To turn them from darkness to light
- To turn them from the power of Satan to God
- To offer them God's forgiveness of their sins
- and to supply them with a safe place where they can practice their faith.

And when we succeed in those goals we end up converting people like Phil Robertson. A man whose life was dramatically changed from the darkness of sin to the light of God.

There are 4 things here I want you to notice in Phil Robertson's conversion.

1st - He was a self-sufficient man. He didn't feel he needed anyone. He could do whatever needed done and was literally a self-made man. As a high-school athlete, he'd earned All-State rankings in football, baseball, and track, which earned him a football scholarship at Louisiana Tech. There, Phil played first-string quarterback. Does anybody know the name of his "backup" quarterback? (Terry Bradshaw of the Pittsburgh Steelers).

He earned a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education and a Master's in Education and he spent several years teaching in Louisiana schools. He was considered to be an excellent teacher by his students.

He could be whatever he wanted to be and do whatever he wanted to do... but he gave it all up to go back to his first love - fishing and hunting.

2ndly - Phil Robertson had no love for God. He kicked a preacher out of his bar. Rejected wife's church-going and said she was too "goody goody" and "Holy roller" for him. And he threw her and the kids out of the house because she refused to change.

3rd - He pretty much ruined his own life. By his own admission sex, drugs and rock & roll nearly destroyed him. He beat up a bar owner and his wife... and was on the run from the law for some time because of that. And he had been so opposed to God that he nearly destroyed his marriage and his family because of his hatred of it.

(PAUSE) But 4th, and most importantly I want you to notice what drew him to Christ.

ILLUS: When he finally came back to Kay to try to rebuild their marriage, Kay suggested that he speak to the preacher he'd kicked out of his bar some time back. Phil remembers that the preacher asked 'What do you think the Gospel is?' And I said 'I guess I don't know'...

"So when he went through Jesus coming down...dying on the cross, being buried and being raised from the dead, I'm like 'How in the world did I ever miss that?'

Now the question for us this morning is this: How did that simple message change the heart of a man like Phil Robertson?

He was a self-sufficient, athletic college trained, atheist and pagan. If you got him mad at you he'd probably just as soon shoot you as look at you.

How did that preacher get this man into Christ?

(PAUSE) Well... he didn't

The preacher didn't get that done.

God got it done.

The preacher just happened to be there at the time.

The preacher was faithful and God used his faithfulness.

1st thing I want you to notice here is that preacher believed God could change anyone. Do you believe God can change anyone?

In our text this morning, we find Paul being standing before a king named Agrippa, a man known in history for his incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice.

(<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/913-agrippa-ii>)

But Paul was not intimidated by this man.

It didn't matter if was a king.

And it didn't matter that his sex life was revolting and evil.

This King needed Jesus... and Paul believed Jesus could change him.

Paul's preaching was so powerful that King Agrippa interrupted him:

"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." (Acts 26:28- 29)

Paul believed Jesus could change the heart of an evil King.

Do you believe that?

Think about the people that frustrate you and anger you the most. Politicians, fellow workers, relatives, neighbors - do you believe Jesus could change their lives? And, if you had a chance, would you tell them about Jesus?

As Christians we have to believe that God can change anyone.

Even people we wouldn't think He could touch.

Do you remember from the story of Phil Robertson where did that preacher first talk to Robertson? (the man's bar). That preacher believed so much in the power of Jesus to change a person's heart that he walked right into the bar this man owned... to talk to him about God.

So, 1st – this preacher believed Jesus could change anyone... anywhere.
Do you?

2ndly – Phil Robertson's wife Kay believed in the power of prayer.
She shared in one of her interviews that even after Phil had kicked her and their 3 sons out of their family's home, she continued to stay in her marriage and prayed for Phil's salvation.

She realized that if Phil's life was going to change... God had to do it.
She could be as loving a wife as she could be and say whatever she wanted to say and it still wouldn't make the difference that God could in her husband's life. She knew she had to pray.

ILLUS: When I first entered the ministry, I was pretty good at talking people into becoming Christians. During my first ministry, I spent 5 weeks working a couple, teaching and teaching and teaching... and I finally got them baptized.

And I never saw them again.

I was not happy.

What had I done wrong? Where had I slipped up?

Why wasn't this couple following up on their acceptance of Christ?

But then I read something in the Gospel of John that changed my thinking
Jesus said: I will send (the Holy Spirit) to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." (John 16:7-8)

I had always thought it was MY job to convict people of their sin.

I had always thought it was MY job to convince them of their need of righteousness.

I had always thought it was MY job to make people understand there was a coming judgment.

And here's Jesus saying that's not my job - that's the Spirit's job.

ILLUS: In every court you'll find a Judge, a Prosecutor and a Defense Attorney.

And then there are witnesses.

The witnesses are there to testify, not to convict. They testify about what they know. About what they've seen and heard. In our case, we witness about God's love for the lost. We are called to witness - to share the news of the Gospel - to tell people that Jesus came to die for them.

So does that mean I don't have to do anything else?

Do I just sit back and wait for people to show up on my doorstep?

No. It doesn't work that way. God expects us to be actively involved in the process of bringing people to Him. And the most powerful tool we have to accomplish that is prayer.
We need to pray!

As new a Christian as Kay Robertson was, she understood that.

So she prayed for Phil's salvation.

AND God worked in her husband's life.

God worked in Phil's life so powerfully, that he went to her work and was tearfully begged her to come back.

"I want my family back... I'm never going to drink again."

But Phil's idea was to change his life on HIS own terms.

Kay knew that would only fix a little of what was wrong in her husband's life.

As long as Phil was in charge, Phil would only change as much as HE wanted to change.

So she did the most intriguing thing. She told him:
"You can't do it by yourself." (repeat this)
You need Jesus to fix what is broken in your life.

And because she convinced him of the need of Jesus in his life, she ended up with a husband whose life became totally changed. Her once pagan husband became a man who has baptized over 300 people in the river near his home and has spoken to thousands about the love of Christ.

This all came to pass because she stayed faithful to God and prayed for her husband.

So, first we've got to believe that God can change anyone.
And 2nd we need to be convinced of the power of prayer in bringing that change about.

And 3rd – we need to stay on message.
Notice, when Paul stood before King Agrippa... Bernice was there.

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."

The king rose, and with him the governor and BERNICE and those sitting with them."
(Acts 26:28-30)

Here is the King with his sister... that he's sleeping with.

It was one of the worst kept secrets in the Roman Empire!

This would be an ideal time to talk about morality (or in their case – immorality) don't you think?

But Paul doesn't say a word about that.

Paul stands before King Agrippa and says this:

"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."

Not a word about Agrippa's immorality.

Instead Paul preached Christ crucified and risen from the dead.

Now, fast forward to the 1970s and preacher talks to a man named Phil Robertson.

Robertson had been notorious for his involvement in sex, drugs and rock and roll.

He's mistreated his wife and family.

And he' rejected God and hated Christians.

But the preacher doesn't mention any of that.

What was the preacher's message?

Robertson says that "when he went through Jesus coming down...dying on the cross, being buried and being raised from the dead, I'm like 'How in the world did I ever miss that?'

My point is this: they stayed on message.

Paul's sermon to Agrippa, & the preacher's talk with Robertson both focused on the same truth: Jesus crucified and risen from the dead.

They didn't have to address the sin of their audience... that was the Spirit's job!

That truth (that Spirit convicts people) FREES us from trying to talk people into becoming Christians.

We don't have to do that!

John 3:16-17 says: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God SENT NOT his Son into the world TO CONDEMN the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

Our message is not one of condemnation... it is one of hope and promise and forgiveness. We don't have to focus on where people have been. Our focus is on what they can be. All we have to do is tell the truth about Christ. All we have to do is tell the good news that Jesus died to forgive our sins.

If people don't believe us, that's not our problem.
It's their problem.

Notice that Paul wasn't upset that Agrippa rejected his message.

Paul knew the truth of what he spoke and it was up to King Agrippa to accept it or reject it.

Once again... they stayed on message.
But that's easier said than done.

Just as an example, let's say you had the opportunity to say ONE THING to the politician of your choice. Think about that for a moment: what politician would you choose to talk to? And what would you tell them?

What would be the ONE THING you would share with them?

I'll tell you what most Christians would focus on (whether it be a mayor, a governor, a congressman, a senator or even a president):
Governmental policies

Homosexuality

Abortion

Religious freedom

Bill of rights

The IRS

The EPA

Immigration

Foreign policy

And I could go on and on and on about topics that are near and dear to the hearts of millions.

Now I'm not saying those aren't important issues.

What I'm saying is: they're not the MOST IMPORTANT issue.

You do realize that your politicians could be entirely in agreement with you and I on ALL of those issues... and still go to hell. And if you or I used our ONE chance to talk to them about governmental policies rather than Jesus Christ Crucified and risen from the dead... we let them go to hell.

It is too easy for us to get "off message." To be drawn into arguments about politics or other emotional ideals and to set aside the most important message of eternity: Christ crucified.

ILLUS: I once visited relatives who wanted to engage me in political debate. They'd rant about this politician or that political party. But I repeatedly told them: "I didn't come here to debate you. I don't want to get into an argument about politics. That's not why I'm here."

You see, we've got to be careful not to get off message.
If we allow that to happen we end focusing on worthy issues... but miss the most important.

We must remember that God is NOT sending us to fulfill our agendas. He is sending us to those around us "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 (Jesus Christ)."

Let's get this straight... we have only one message.
And that one message can change the world.

CLOSE: Just think.

What would it be like if you got the chance to tell a drunk or a drug user or a bar owner about Jesus and over the next year that drunk baptized 30 of his friends into Christ?
What would it be like if you got the chance to talk to a fellow worker that no one liked about Jesus and over the next year they brought their whole family to church?
What would it be like if you got the chance to talk to a politician about Christ and over the next year he led 20 of his fellow politicians to believe, repent and be immersed for the forgiveness of their sins?

All those people's lives could be changed because you took God seriously.
All those people's eternal destinies could be turned from hell to heaven because you believed God's promise that He could open their eyes and give them the forgiveness of sins that they need.

But maybe you are in our audience today and you haven't made that decision for Christ yet.
INVITATION