

w/b 16th July 2017

THEME: AND THIS IS YOUR TESTIMONY - STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

PASSAGE: ACTS 26 1-32

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defence: ² "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defence against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

⁹ "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

¹² "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ^[a] 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

" 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 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. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ 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.'

¹⁹ "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the

Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.²¹ That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.²² But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—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.”

²⁴ *At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defence. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”*

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday, we had a wonderful opportunity to hear Rory share his story or testimony of how he came to know Christ. As mentioned previously, a testimony is a combination of personal experience and eyewitness account. Our stories may not be as dramatic as Rory’s but make no mistake, they are just as important.

As a church, I believe we are entering an exciting new season which will include numerous opportunities to share not just the good news but also our stories of how the good news changed us. In view of this, it’s good to have at least a rough idea of what our story looks like

In this study, we look at Paul’s story – get some tips and then have a think about what our own stories might look like

LAUNCH

Consider the following fairy tales:

- Snow white and the 7 dwarves
- Little red riding hood
- The 3 little pigs
- Cinderella

Which tells the best story and why? What values or morals are they trying to teach? What are the key differences between these tales and any story that involves coming to Christ?

DISCOVERY & UNDERSTANDING

Read Acts 26 1-24

If you were to divide Paul’s story up into key sections, what would they be? Which verses would you allocate to each heading?

A personal story can essentially be divided into 3 sections: before, during and after. (The 'during' being the point of conversion). Get a couple of people in the group to share their before, during and after.

In what ways were the accounts shared similar and in what ways were they different?

At Just One Andrew White (famous vicar of Baghdad) talked about being a Christian as far back as he could remember. Do you think this sort of testimony is valid? Why or why not?

THE BEFORE BIT

Many people's actions spring out of their unsatisfied deep inner needs. What were one or two of your unsatisfied deep inner needs before you came to know Jesus Christ? Some examples of inner needs are:

_ lack of peace, _ fear of death, _ something missing, _ no meaning to life, _ desire to be in control, _ loneliness, _ lack of security, _ lack of purpose, _ lack of significance, _ no real friends, _ no motivation

Non-Christians are usually trying to satisfy their deep inner needs through unsatisfactory solutions. In the past, what unsatisfactory solutions did you use to attempt to meet those deep inner needs?

_ marriage/family, _ work, _ drugs/alcohol, _ sports/fitness, _ money, _ education, _ hobbies/entertainment, _ sex, _ wrong friends

Might these last two questions help you in the way you tell your stories? If so how?

THE DURING BIT

What aspects of the gospel are critical to all personal stories or testimonies?

(answer: all have sinned, sin's penalty, Christ paid the penalty, must receive Christ)

How do these aspects come across in Paul's Acts 26 story?

THE AFTER BIT

How has Christ satisfied some of your inner needs and the inadequate ways in which you tried to meet them? What aspects continue to be a struggle

What are some of the other amazing results of being a Christian that you might wish to include within your story?

APPLICATION

Pray for one another to have exciting new opportunities to share your stories

Much of this study is taken from the following excellent paper on the CS Lewis website

REFERENCES

http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/334

Also has really good sections on avoiding jargon, and ten hints & tips to telling your story well. Feel free to look at and discuss these though you may not have the time

Also: Please avoid the temptation to feel you have to put your head down and plough your way through all the questions. This can lead to a very unsatisfactory study as you almost feel you have to race through them against the clock. Even if you only do a couple of the questions really well, this can be hugely satisfactory. You can always divide into 2 and tackle the rest next week