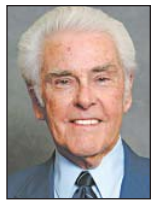


Redeemed from an unbelieving or disappointing past

Paul had been taken into Roman custody for being at the center of a riot in the Jerusalem temple complex (Acts 21:26-22:29). For his own safety, he was taken to Caesarea (23:11-37),



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where he remained in the custody of the Roman governor Felix for two years (24:27). After two years, the new governor Festus examined Paul's case and sought to send Paul to Jerusalem to be tried before the Jewish leaders. However, Paul (who was a Roman citizen) appealed to Caesar (25:9-12). While Paul waited to be taken to Rome, the Jewish King Agrippa II visited Festus. Festus brought Paul before Agrippa, who was interested in listening to him (25:13-26).

"Since Agrippa was king of the Jews, Festus was in a unique position to assist him concerning Paul's appeal. He needed to formulate an official report of the charges against Paul to be sent with the appeal" (John B. Polhill, "Acts," *The New International Commentary*, Vol. 26, p. 402).

Paul's speech to King Agrippa is a summarization of his history from Acts 22-26. His explanation of his commitment to Judaism, which led him to participation in the arrest and death of Christians who were considered to be heretics by the Jewish faith, sets the stage for the title of this lesson. Polhill points out that "except for the Sadducees, the Jews believed in resurrection, fervently hoped for it, but rejected Paul's conviction that it had begun in Christ" (p. 500). Paul's main emphasis is his persecution of Christ and his conversion on the Damascus Road when he was commissioned to serve Christ in spite of his persecution of him and his believers (26:12-18),

Hatred for Jesus and His teachings dominated many people then and now (Acts 26:9-11). Paul had acted against the Christians because of his conviction that they were wrong

in their beliefs and were seeking to destroy the faith once given to the Jewish leaders in the synagogues of the territory.

In our own day, there are atheistic persons and groups who are seeking to eliminate all references to religion in the public sector. Lawsuits have been brought to local courts that have ended up in the Supreme Court. The court has rejected some of their suits. However, this has not settled the issue of what Christians can do in the public domain to defend their case for Christ.

Jesus calls on those who oppose him to become his disciples (Acts 26:12-18). Paul, of course, is the outstanding New Testament character whom God even commissions to become his personal witness. God said to him, "For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things you have seen in me and to those in which I will appear to you." Paul's message focused on the Lord's death to offer forgiveness for sin and resurrection from death. The king declared that Paul was not worthy of death under Roman law and he should be sent on to Caesar.

The story of John Newton's conversion from being a slave trader to a Christian minister is well known from his words to the hymn "Amazing Grace." He came from a history of trading slaves primarily from Africa to be sold in several other countries, including the United States. We rejoice in his conversion and in his marvelous hymn.

A member of my senior adult Sunday School class works with inmates of a Missouri prison to help them find personal changes through faith. One long-term inmate recently told him, "I wish I had known about this possibility before I did what I did, but now I believe I can be forgiven and be helped to be a changed person."

You can surrender life with all of its possibilities to Jesus for a radical transformation (Acts 26:19-29). Paul sees an opportunity to have the emperor in Rome agree that he had

Bible Studies for Life

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Scripture: Acts 26:9-20

done nothing worthy of death under Roman law and be freed to grow in his relationship and ministry for Christ after release.

In my work with senior adults I came across a book by Abigail Trafford, former Washington Post health editor, titled *My Time*. She had retired from her former assignment and became a columnist for the newspaper. In her reflections on life for people living from 55 to 75 years of age, she coined the term "my time." The editor of the book describes what she means:

"This generation is the first to experience a period of personal renaissance between middle and old age — what Trafford calls *My Time*. Defining this period as an entirely new stage in the life cycle... Trafford shows us how to reinvent ourselves in these bonus decades" (book cover).

Among the many helpful aids to living in my time is to do a life review. Based on your life experiences, what do you want to do with the rest of your life? In a sense, Paul did a life review for King Agrippa that he wrote as a prisoner, capturing his own reflections of what his life looked like and what he wanted it to be.

In a chapter on confronting the spiritual crisis of "my time," Trafford discusses living in anticipation that death always lurks in the horizon of your thoughts, but "my time" completely changes the focus. With the emergence of this new stage in the life cycle, "the spiritual imperative shifts to life rather than death" (p. 209).

She acknowledges that the spiritual crisis can be hindered by social and medical crises but her emphasis is on developing a "my time" perspective to live life to its fullest as long as possible. In your last years of life, what will you do with your time?

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