

## True Power Evangelism

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Acts 25:23-26:8

Quite some time ago now, John Wimber made popular a unique brand of worship and outreach with the name, “Power Evangelism.” His book describes his different approach as a form of outreach by supernatural events, like healings, speaking in tongues, and words of knowledge as demonstration of the power, and therefore, the reality, of God.

Apparently, Paul did not get that memo. It is most likely that Paul would not at all recognize such an approach. Nevertheless, there is unmistakable power at work in the Apostle’s last speech, in his defense before King Agrippa.

You must recognize how poorly our Versions have divided this chapter. We have first this investigation. It is no longer a trial but a search for a way to describe this unchargeable Christian man. Such are the fruits of cowardice and politicizing in Festus. He has no answer, but only a desire to please the Jews. And so, in an equally political move, he invites the neighboring king and his sister, who were close and supportive of the Jewish people, but who have no jurisdiction here.

I want you to especially feel the setting that is here: see in this regal and magnificent mansion, on the one side, with the King in great pomp – his entourage of cabinet and advisers, dressed in their finest, with all the heads of the military assembled, and all the important movers and shakers of the area. The word for pomp is *phantasia* – a word which means imagination, show, or display.

And here, so it seems, is lowly Paul; who knows how he is dressed; who knows if there are any at his side. We do know one feature – that he is clearly chained, as a prisoner.

But let us not judge by our eyes. These are two competing dignities, two poms, if you will. For Paul stands in a genuine show and display of true glory, power and majesty. He stands in a robe unlike any other. He is surrounded by a great host, a heavenly host, who behold his progress. He has the fame of the Name that is above every name upon him; a name that will outlast all the kings of the earth, and the very sun and moon itself!

We want to jump ahead to our last verse to bring this out: this strong heart and mind conviction of the reality of the resurrection, through the One who IS the Life! He is thinking, living, eating, breathing, and drinking this momentous truth: How can you not believe God's capacity, God's purpose, God's plan to raise the dead? And so much more when His own Son has undeniably shown all men that this is so?

So here is the fleeting and empty pomp of man; and here is the true glory of the Son of God, come to be the Savior. We can almost hear the beautiful strains of music sounding in these halls – “Wondrous things of thee are spoken!”

*Saviour, if of Zion's city, I, through grace, a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in thy Name:  
Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and  
show;  
Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know.*

As we come to our message today, I want us to stand where Paul stands; to believe as Paul believes; but especially to evangelize in the way Paul did.

We live in a world full of itself; full of riches, power, fame, but it is a stranger, an enemy even to the power and riches of grace in the Risen and True Savior King. It is a difficult task to reach such people. Often, like King Agrippa, they are also proudly wrapped in the robes of

religion. But we see in Paul the way – no doubt flowing out of his faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him; who had slain the old man in repentance; who had died, but now is risen; and thinks upon those things which are above, where Christ is, seated, at God’s right hand!

To the Ephesians, he wrote:

*<sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might <sup>20</sup> which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Eph 1:18-21)*

I pray the same for you! Paul here is clearly different from many in our day and age.

1. First, Paul was no syncretist – no joining forces with the Jews, or any others on this matter. While claiming to be a Jew indeed, as Scripture defines a true Jew, he distances himself from those who oppose themselves and the Word of God.
2. Second, Paul was no entertainer – did not become a clown, a panderer for the attention and acclaim of men. Preachers are not here to tickle our funny bones, but to make you healthy and strong in the Lord of glory and His truth.
3. Third, Paul held no minimalist approach – just barely winning a place at the table, just hoping for a scrap of religious tolerance. He didn’t say as many do today: “can’t I hold my views in private?” With the political winds being what they were, this would have been a temptation – as it is in our day. We are pressured to stay

quiet on such topics as homosexuality, radical Islam, and a handful of other undesirables. But Paul reflects the reality that you and I are members of a kingdom that indestructible, eternal, and growing; should such persons act in a way to deny their citizenship?

Let us come then to several points in the text on True Power Evangelism, and **we begin, first of all**, with the surprising need for humility. Paul makes a humble appeal. He counted this opportunity a privilege, and this would keep him from being overwhelmed.

He certainly is not sarcastic or provocative, but respectful, even to those who don't deserve it.

“Sinners are not pelted into Christ with stones of hard provoking language,” says William Gurnall, “but wooed into Christ by heart-melting exhortations.”

How do you approach people? Do you act as one who is better than they are? As an enlightened one over them? Or do you come alongside of them as those precious to Christ and facing difficulties in coming to Christ? Do you come to humbly assist them and bring them into serious and spiritual matters?

We have such a great need for this in every time, but especially in our troubled day: *“The need for gentle-spirited evangelists was never greater than it is today in our cynical, burnt-out, gospel-hardened communities. We cannot merely expect a hearing because we have a great message; we must win a hearing with humility and a discernably caring attitude to people.”* Keddie

**Secondly and similarly**, see Paul identifying with them. We have our own agenda as Christian witnesses, but that does not mean that our outreach is not personal and vitally interested in them! Paul spoke to Jews as Jews here, and owned his Jewish background to identify with

**who** they are, **where** they are, **what** they are. And isn't he following his Master, the Lord Jesus, in this? Jesus, who with Nicodemus, spoke theology; Jesus, who with the Samaritan woman, spoke about morals; Jesus, who with the rich young ruler, spoke about money. Gordon Keddie again notes how the Samaritan woman wanted to talk theology and the rich young ruler wanted to talk morals, but that would have led away from their true need. He says "we cannot evangelize unless we understand the Word; and we cannot evangelize unless we understand the world."

What else do we learn in this apologia, this defense, in this evangelistic opportunity? **Thirdly**, we learn that Paul is genuine. There is an open-book attitude about him, with nothing to hide, in 4-5. God uses our past, our experiences, and our lessons, to His own glory. It is not by being somebody we are not, but being those somebodies that we are by grace, that He uses. People want to see realness in our lives. They will want to know that this is not a sham, but the answer they are in need of. And what a mistake to come to people as though we are perfect and all-holy people!

But it is not merely experience. **4<sup>thly</sup>** Paul's approach is eminently Word-centered – the Word of God, the promise of God, the faithfulness of God, the goodly heritage of God, is closest to his heart. See several things here on this matter:

- To be God centered is to be in the **historic** line with other believers. This is how those of old lived. This it to be part of a great army; a covenantal army! In so doing, we are shaking hands with the heroes of the OT.
- To be God centered is to understand the nature of God's grace, salvation, and new life. The central purpose of the OT was that Abraham and his children would be, by the gospel, a blessing to all the nations.

- To be God centered is to further more to be Hope-filled – what a quality this is which stands out and above our world! Our world is a despairing world, no matter how you dress it up! But we patiently wait for the coming kingdom and the resurrection which ushers us in.
- To be God centered is to be worshipful. Evangelism for Paul was not merely getting people saved. Recall that the Great Commission is about discipleship, making people learners, and not just to convert them. The book of Romans begins and ends on the mission to bring the nations into obedience to God. We are to be a people unto God, a kingdom of priests, one flock, the body of Christ Jesus.
- To be God centered involves also being convicting – speaking of the moral failure of mankind; telling hard truth. Paul will piggy back off of this in bringing himself into the same sinful unbelief in the next part. “The evangelist,” says Blanchard “must be as bold in denouncing sin as others are in committing it!” (Repeat) We will return to this next time, when Paul owns his own sin, his once seeing things the way he now rejects. He did not understand the fullness of the Kingdom Power of the Resurrected One.

This brings us to something of the power pack of this passage in verse 8, and where we will have to stop, **our 5<sup>th</sup> point**.

Why do you judge it, unbelievable, incredible, that God raises the dead? He uses the additional thought of this unbelieve being among them, or why is this here with you? It is such a well-placed question, isn't it?

*What! is it thought incredible with you that God should raise the dead? So it may be read. If it is marvelous in your eyes, should it be marvelous in mine, saith the Lord of hosts? Zech. viii. 6.*

“If it is above the power of nature,” says Matthew Henry, “yet it is not above the power of the God of nature. Note, There is no reason why

we should think it at all incredible that God should raise the dead. We are not required to believe anything that is incredible, anything that implies a contradiction. There are motives of [believability] sufficient to carry us through all the doctrines of the Christian religion, and this particularly of the resurrection of the dead. Has not God an infinite almighty power, to whom nothing is impossible? Did he not make the world at first out of nothing, with a word's speaking? Did he not form our bodies from out of the clay, and breathe into us the breath of life at first? and cannot the same power form them again out of their own clay, and put life into them again? Do we not see a kind of resurrection in nature, at the return of every spring? Has the sun such a force to raise dead plants, and should it seem incredible to us that God should raise dead bodies?" Matthew Henry

Great word! A great word of hope and encouragement indeed!

With that let us make **some concluding applications** -

First, are you bringing God down to your level, as these ones were evidently doing? Aren't we to expect great things of God? Is it incredible with you? *Is your god so small? Barely a god at all? Fitted slim within your brain? No lion strong, but a kitten, tame?* Calvin more fully examines us when he says:

“Men are for the most part malignant and injurious to God who will not have his arm to reach any farther than their understanding and reason can reach; so that so much as in them lies they would desire to restrain the greatness of his works, which surpasses heaven and earth, to their narrow capacity. Paul commands us to consider what God is able to do, that being lifted up above the world, we may learn to conceive the faith of the resurrection, not according to the weak capacity of our mind, but according to his omnipotence.”

**Second**, why are other things not more incredible to men – things which they believe? Why will people believe such utter nonsense, and

reject God's truth? Men believe this great and wonderful world just happened! We follow philosophers who cannot answer the question: 'why is there something and not nothing'? You can see it in bizarre religions – Mormonism believing that the sun and moon were inhabited! Scientists at the end of the 1800's believing Mars was certainly inhabited! And there are those today looking to aliens to explain the creation of this world! This is testimony to our darkened minds, our hard hearts, and our rebellious wills! We will not have this God rule over us! O, heaven help us!

**Thirdly**, are we following Paul's bent – not merely 'won't you?' but 'how can you not?' That is a great way to freight the question, as they say. Why is it incredible for you? We should be standing with such fullness of faith and conviction in a fallen, empty and needy culture! We should be saying, 'will you believe?' but also, 'how can you not believe?' "If sinners be damned," said Spurgeon, "at least let them leap to hell over our bodies."

Do you see that this is our responsibility? Listen to handful of great quotes on the Great Commission, as something of an exclamation point on our message today:

1. Hudson Taylor reminds us that the Great Commission is not an option to be considered, but a command to be obeyed.
2. Phillips observes that the Gospel is a frozen asset unless it is communicated.
3. AW Pink wrote: "If a church does not evangelize it will fossilize."
4. And before him, JC Ryle preached that "no candle which God lights was ever meant to burn alone."
5. Finally, JI Packer, who wrote "Knowing God," says: "Holy Writ is to be kept not under a bushel, but under men's noses. Its message is to be held forth as diligently as it is held fast."

That is the true power evangel of Paul; may it be yours as well! Amen.