

Why We Preach Jesus Christ

Acts 26:1-23

So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: ²"I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

⁹ "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

¹² "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles— to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

¹⁹ "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." **ESV**

Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee, and the man who became the Apostle Paul was a **troublemaker!** Before the Lord saved him, he caused those who were "of the Way" [that is what early Christians were called] a great deal of trouble.

In fact, if you were a believer in Jesus Christ, and Saul found you, you would have been arrested and perhaps killed. If you know your Bible, you will remember in Acts 7 we are told that when Stephen preached Jesus as the Christ to the Jewish Council they "cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears," and proceeded to stone him to death.

A young man watched the clothes of the killers of Stephen and "was consenting to his death." That young man was Saul.

But something happened to Saul. In Acts 9, Saul was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord," on his way to Damascus with letters from the high priest to the synagogues, so that if he found any who were "of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem,"

Then Saul met Jesus!

After that confrontation with Jesus, Saul / Paul was still a **troublemaker!** Except now he troubled the Jews. He still went to the synagogues, not to arrest believers in Jesus, but to preach Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ!

Some time ago I heard an excellent sermon preached from Acts 26:15-16; explaining why Saul of Tarsus became a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As I listened it was clear to me that everyone who is called of God to the Gospel ministry will find their calling to be very similar to Saul's, not in literal detail, but at least in content.

Acts 26:15-16

15 And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,

Let me tell you what happened when I met Jesus. Did I meet Jesus while I was on the road killing Christians? Not literally, but in a very real sense my life could be characterized as destructive of anything that had to do with Christ. My salvation experience may not be exactly the same as Saul's, but I met the same Jesus that Saul met! I know what it means to "kick against the goads." Let me tell you how.

As a matter of explanation a "goad" was a sharp stick that was used to poke an ox to cause it to move: It is hard to kick against the goads.

***Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?
It is hard for you to kick against the goads.***

**Jim, Jim, why are you persecuting Me?
It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**

When I was 14 years old, I was "saved" and baptized. My name is on a bronze plaque as a charter member of a large Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama. But I spent the next 19 years after being "saved" proving that my "salvation" was false and that I had no conviction of sin, or felt any need for a Savior.

When the Lord, in His providence did save me, He used my curiosity to lead me to a church that preached the Bible as the very Word of God.

I was a drunk, a blasphemer, a scoffer, and worse. But I had started going to church and pretending to be someone that I knew in my heart was false.

For years, I had boasted that, “At least I am not a hypocrite.”

Then on Saturday night, September 28, 1968, I was busy doing “good works.” I had volunteered to listen to and catalog tapes of gospel sermons. For nine months as I listened to sermons I had heard the truth of God’s Word preached. And I really did, “kick against the goads.” While I listened to the Gospel that Saturday night, the Presence of God was so strong that I got up from the table and went into an empty room. I fell to my knees and began to beg for mercy. I was convinced that I was lost and that I deserved to be in hell. I confessed my sinfulness and guilt to God and said, "O God, I can't live this lie any longer, save me or send me to hell!

And you know what? He saved me. I learned what Paul means when he says,
"to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Do I believe that I am saved because I had a “Damascus Road” confrontation with Jesus? No! I believe that I am saved because I trust in the righteousness of Jesus this very minute!

Do I believe that I am saved because I have been a Christian for these past 46 years; taught Bible studies and preached? No! I believe that I am saved because I continue to believe in Jesus!

Do I want to be saved to escape hell? After all, it was Paul in 2 Cor 5:11, who wrote, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;”
No, I don’t want to exist without Christ.

That’s what hell is: eternity without Christ. Nothing will ever satisfy you; you lust for drink, no satisfaction; you lust for pornography, no satisfaction; you lust for possessions, no satisfaction. Nothing can truly satisfy you but Jesus!

So I will tell you why I am a preacher. I will tell you why these other men preach. Bros. Gables, Swain, and Bunger.

And I believe they will say Amen to what I am about to say.

It was not in an audible voice as Saul heard, but just as real. Jesus said to me,
"rise and stand on you feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you."

I have been preaching and teaching for over 46 years. The Lord has taught me many of the things that He revealed to Paul and the other writers of Scripture. The Lord made me a "minister and a witness."

On the wall in the church office is my certificate of ordination:

"WE, the undersigned, hereby certify that upon the recommendation and request of the Vineland Park Baptist Church at Hueytown, Alabama which had full and sufficient opportunity for judging his gifts, and after satisfactory examination by us in regard to his Christian experience, call to the ministry, and views of Bible doctrine, **James Alton Gunn** was solemnly and publicly set apart and ordained to the work of THE GOSPEL MINISTRY by authority and order *of the Vineland Park Baptist Church at Hueytown, Alabama on the 12th day of March, 2000.*

That certificate didn't make me a preacher.

But I am humbled to be able to say that I am one of the elders of Vineland Park Baptist Church.

Why do we preach? The Lord made us ministers and witnesses of Christ.

When the Lord does it, there are no other options that you can live with.

Jim Gunn
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