

Paul's Testimony

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Acts 26
Preached on: Sunday, February 3, 2019

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, we're delighted to continue our study of the book of Philippians today in a somewhat unusual way. Let me just remind you that we've opened our study of Philippians with some overview messages looking at the message of the book as a whole and we saw that Paul is writing to the Philippian church as those who were partners in the Gospel with him, and we saw that a Gospel partnership is based on elements of gratitude, of commitment, of unity, of truth, and of application. We covered those points in earlier times and now we come to the beginning of the letter, just barely coming to the beginning of the letter as you will see.

In Philippians 1:1-2, if you will turn there with me for just a moment. We're only going to touch there before we move on to something else, but just to set the context, Paul opened the letter saying, "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons," and it's important for us to maybe step back and just to remember a very basic seemingly simple point that would be easy to overlook, but that would actually effect the entire way that we receive the book of Philippians. Paul, who is this Paul and why is he writing this letter to this church? By what right or prerogative does he speak? And what is his perspective on the Lord Jesus Christ as he writes to this church?

Paul is the author of this book and knowing him will help our study, and one of the things that we have delightfully in the word of God, is that we have Paul's own testimony about his conversion to Christ recorded for us in the pages of Scripture itself, and I want to just take a morning here, I want to take this hour, to just remember the nature of what happened in Paul's life that put him in a position to write such a letter as this. So I'm going to invite you to start by turning to the book of Acts 24. Acts 24, and primarily speaking in Acts 13 through 28, you read about the ministry and the life of Paul. You see his conversion listed a little bit earlier in the book, but you see him going out on three different missionary journeys during this time. You see him preaching Christ. You see him enduring persecution as a result and successfully going from place to place in Europe establishing churches, founding, planting churches that became some of the recipients of future letters from him that are recorded later in the New Testament. And when we read about the Apostle Paul toward the end of the book of Acts, we find him in trouble. We find him heading to prison because of some complex interaction that had taken place between the Jews and the Romans. Paul met some of his greatest hostility in the Gospel

from Jewish opponents and the Jewish opponents were committed to trying to silence Paul, and as you'll see, even trying to assassinate him in order to silence his great effective voice for Christ.

So through this interaction, Paul found himself standing before a Roman governor named Felix, and he had to answer charges that the Jews had brought against him if you'll look at Acts 24, beginning in verse 1. We're kind of picking this story up in the middle of its narrative but for the sake of time, we're confident that we'll be able to get the gist of what we need to see today.

Acts 24, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.

So they were trying to get Paul in trouble with the Roman authorities.

2 After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor [and he flatters the governor in perhaps the manner of the day and says], "Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, 3 we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.

It makes you just want to really hate attorneys, doesn't it? I understand. I really do.

Verse 4,

4 But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing. 5 For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him.

Now, they brought this charge against Paul and they're trying to get him convicted so that he can be put away in prison. Well, Felix, without going into all of the details, Felix sat on this case for two years without doing anything to resolve it, and it wasn't until a man named Festus came to replace him that this matter came up again.

Look at the end of Acts 24, beginning in verse 24.

24 ... Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 But as [Paul] was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix

became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."

He didn't like what Paul was saying. He was intimidated by the Gospel. He was convicted and he just wanted to silence Paul and have his voice go out of his ears.

So verse 26,

26 At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.

Now here's what I was saying earlier, verse 27,

27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

So Felix had this interaction from time to time over a course of two years with the Apostle Paul, but never did anything to fulfill his duty as a governor and dispose of his case, and so he just let Paul languish; he let the case continue on and never brought it up for resolution. Now Felix has been replaced by another man named Festus, and Festus is going to assume office and we see this coming up in Acts 25:1. This is all just by way of background to set the stage for Paul's testimony. Chapter 25, verse 1,

1 Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. 2 And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him, 3 requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way).

They had plots that they were trying to carry out that they weren't disclosing and their intent was to kill Paul while he was being transferred to Jerusalem.

In verse 4,

4 Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. 5 "Therefore," he said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him."

So Festus, after they go to Caesarea, conducts a hearing and he asks Paul about going to Jerusalem in verse 6.

6 After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he [meaning Festus] went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 After Paul arrived,

the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove, 8 while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

So there's very formal legal charges being brought and Paul's defense is stated there saying, "I am not guilty."

Verse 9,

9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?" 10 But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.

So Festus asked Paul if he would voluntarily go to Jerusalem to stand trial for these charges that the Jews were bringing against him. Paul implicitly knew that to go to Jerusalem was not in his legal interest, that the Jews had no jurisdiction to take him there, and so he objects and he asserts his rights as a Roman citizen.

In verse 11 he says,

11 "If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar."

He says, "I want to go before Caesar's court and have Caesar's court hear my appeal because I am being treated unjustly as a Roman citizen here."

Now in verse 12,

12 ... when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

So Festus, as the governor, is going to send him to Caesar to let the appeal take place. Festus had a responsibility in sending this appeal to Caesar's court, he had to report to Caesar what Paul was being tried for, what is the nature of the case against Paul. Caesar when he receives the report, needs to know why this man is here. "Why are you before me and why did the governor send you?" The governor sends a report along to indicate the charges, but Festus had a problem, he didn't know what to say. He didn't know what to say. He hadn't heard anything that would give a legitimate reason for this to create a problem and for this to take the time of Caesar's court to hear a case involving this man and so he did this, he arranged a hearing so that another leader in the region named Agrippa, could give advice to him on what to write to Caesar.

Look at Acts 25:23. Actually, maybe we should go back to verse 13 for just a minute to set the context a little bit better. Acts 25:13,

13 Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus. [So they're dignitaries and Festus receives them.] 14 While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix; 15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. 16 I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges."

So he goes on and he gives a bit more explanation to him. He says in verse 20,

20 "Being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether [Paul] was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. 21 But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." [Festus said] "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

So Agrippa is now going to be in the position of being a counselor to Festus and he's going to hear what Paul has to say and then the plan is for him to advise Festus what he's going to write to Caesar so that he can fulfill his responsibility and not get in trouble with the Emperor on sending a prisoner without an adequate basis for him to appear before Caesar's court. I realize we're covering a lot of detail here in a short amount of time.

Verse 23 now in Acts 25,

23 So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. [So this is a high dignified occasion where Paul is being brought in to speak.] 24 Festus said [he opens the proceedings], "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. 26 Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. 27 For it

seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

So that was a lot of background simply to make a simple statement. Paul is in a formal setting here where he is going to be asked to speak. The purpose in the plan of Man is for him to give a statement so that they can understand what report they would write to Caesar and so there is a legal proceeding, there is a procedure taking place here that has to be satisfied for the legal proceedings to be what they were supposed to be. So that's the formal occasion of it. In the plan of God, however, this is going to become the occasion for Paul to declare his testimony of faith in Christ to the leading dignitaries of the entire region. This would be like an opportunity to speak before a joint session of Congress, so to speak. It's a loose analogy but just to give you a picture, Paul here is in a political legal situation that he is going to convert to a spiritual testimony and to name Christ in front of all of these men who have gathered together to hear what he has to say.

What we're going to find, then, is that as Paul gives his testimony to them, we're going to be refreshed in our understanding of who Paul is, first of all, and that will serve us for the future study of Philippians, but also it's going to give us an opportunity to simply review some basic principles about the nature of God's grace in salvation. The nature of God's grace in salvation is going to be our specific focus for this morning as expressed by Paul as he gives his testimony. It is so crucial for us to remember that we are all sinners, lost and bound in darkness, under bondage to Satan, and that we have no merit of our own in which to commend ourselves to God. If you walked in thinking anything different, I'm glad to have the opportunity to disabuse you of the notion of your own self-righteousness. Scripture says that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Scripture says that we are all dead in trespasses and sins. Scripture declares unambiguously in the words of Jesus Christ that if any man is to enter the kingdom of heaven, he must be born again. There is nothing that you can do to save your own soul. We are debtors to God. We are in need of God's rescue. We are in need of his salvation. We are in need of his deliverance and if God does not act, none of us would be saved, and if God does not act on your heart, you will not be saved. That's how desperate it is. You cannot save yourself.

Paul was in a position as well that he could not save himself, and when you think about it, when you step back, there's something that we need to remember here, is that it's not simply a matter of our helplessness that puts us in need of salvation, but it is the fact that you and I through our sins have incurred and brought the wrath of God upon our own heads. We are guilty and God is righteously angry with sinners who have sinned against him. There is need for salvation. There is need for deliverance from our sins, and we need to understand that while God could righteously pour wrath upon us from the beginning, that he has given a window of time in which people might repent and be saved and the nature of that tells us so much about the nature of God's grace in salvation and that's what we want to see as we walk through Paul's testimony here in Acts 26.

What are we going to see? First of all, what is the nature of God's grace in salvation? First of all, you are going to see the patience of Christ. The patience of Christ, his longsuffering attitude toward those who are rebels against him. Without the patience of

Christ, no one would be saved. So that's what we're going to see in this first aspect, this first section of Paul's testimony. Paul now gives his testimony beginning in Acts 26:1.

1 Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

So he acknowledges the position, the secular position that King Agrippa holds. He defers to that. He respects that and he asks him to bear patiently as he speaks his mind on what he wants to say.

What does Paul say about his testimony and about the nature of things? Well, Paul goes back to his pre-conversion days to explain that he once was like the Jews that are now accusing him. Look at verse 4 with me. Paul was an orthodox Jew free from outward corruption he says in verse 4,

4 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. 6 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

Paul is saying this, he says, "These Jews who are accusing me know that I used to be a Pharisee from the strictest sect of their own religion." So there's a very powerful dynamic right from the beginning. He was a Pharisee of high scholarship and religious zeal and so already there's building a sense of question, of query, of what's going on here, when you recognize that Paul used to be a man just like those who were accusing him. What happened, then, to turn them against one who seemingly was one of their own, is the idea. Paul goes on to say, "It's not just that I was a Pharisee, I was a Pharisee of highest zeal," as he explains in verse 9. He tells Agrippa that he used to savagely persecute Christians. Verse 9, he says,

9 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And as I punished them often in all the

synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

Now here's what I want you to see from this. Paul here has described his pre-conversion life, right? He was a very serious Jew and not only that, he was one who savagely pursued and even helped put to death simple humble followers of Christ. Paul was full of self-righteousness and he was a murderous accuser and persecutor of the brethren. Now, think about that from God's perspective. Think about that from Christ's perspective. God looking down on Paul in that condition and in that quality of life, saw a man who was utterly encased in false religion, saw a man who was blind in his zeal, saw a man hostile not only to the followers of Christ but hostile to Christ himself. As you recall when Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus, he said, "Paul, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? Why are you persecuting Me?" His attacks on the followers of Christ were really an attack on Christ himself.

Now let that sink in for a moment. Paul's guilt was great. He was blind and he was attacking Christ himself. I ask you, by what human standard would anyone show mercy to someone who was attacking them like that? Paul was manifesting through his behavior that he wanted Christ himself dead, he wanted Christ himself silenced. Paul was not predisposed to Christianity at all. To the contrary, he was a zealous Jew greatly opposed to Christ, greatly hostile to everything that was associated with the Lord Jesus, and as we know, skipping over the story for a moment, as you know, despite Paul's hostility, the Lord nevertheless saved him, the Lord nevertheless showed mercy to him. How are we to understand that?

Well, for starters – I'm jumping ahead of myself here but that's okay. For starters, I want you to turn over to 1 Timothy 1. Paul echoes this aspect of his testimony in a letter he wrote later to his disciple Timothy. He says in 1 Timothy 1:12, he said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor." So you see here in condensed form Paul is saying the same thing about his testimony as he writes to Timothy. It's as though Paul just couldn't quite get it out of his mind what the nature of his prior life was of how he had attacked Christ and attacked his people and there was just this echo of his mind, no doubt, as at times he would remember the cries and the fears that he inflicted upon those that he was persecuting. It's very poignant and yet he says, "Christ put me into service."

Why did Christ do that? Why not just cast him aside? Why not just cast him into hell for these crimes against Christ that he had committed? He goes on to say in verse 13, "Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." Verse 16, "Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." Paul says that, "My testimony shows the willingness of the Lord Jesus to bear with the sins of people against

Him in order to accomplish their salvation in the end." He is patient when sinners have rebelled against him. He is patient and willing to show mercy, willing to show grace even to one like Paul, encased in false religion and a persecutor of Christ's own people.

Patience. In 2 Peter 3 it says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise toward you but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Beloved, what I want you to see is that there is this blessed perfection, there is this blessed attribute of God that is present in Christ that bears with, that tolerates, that in a sense overlooks the sins of people for a time rather than bringing judgment upon them immediately as they deserve, instead he bears with them in order to bring the Gospel to them in order that they might hear, believe, repent, and be saved.

Do you understand, my Christian brother and sister, that were it not for patience like that in the very nature, in the very essence of who God is and who Christ is, that none of us could have been saved? Do you realize that your sins deserved immediate judgment and yet God did not bring that down upon you? Do you realize as I can certainly remember in my own mouth, that your blasphemes against Christ were not immediately judged and brought to account? Do you remember how your sins of the flesh and your sins of the mind and the arrogance of your life were a rebellion, an offense to God and he held it not against you? He didn't make that so that you forfeited your opportunity at salvation those of you who were liars, schemers, rebels, and now you find yourself here in Christ. Beloved, what I want you to see is that one aspect of your gratitude toward God, one aspect of the reality that enabled you to one day come to Christ was that there was this longsuffering nature in Christ that bore with your sins until the time came where the Spirit worked in your heart and brought you to faith in Christ and so everyone of us here, in a sense Christian and non-Christian alike, we are debtors to, we have been on the receiving end of great patience from a merciful and gracious God for us to be in the position that we are at here today. Without the patience of God, none of us would have been saved.

There is a twofold aspect to responding to that truth. One is a recognition of humility that says, "I did deserve God's judgment. I was worthy of judgment and yet He hasn't judged me like I deserved." And on the other side of that coin is this profound sense of gratitude, "God, You have been patient with me. You've been patient with me not only before my conversion, You have been patient with me throughout my inconsistent, immature, often failing Christian life." Isn't that true of you, beloved? Hasn't God been merciful to you even as a Christian? Hasn't he been patient with you?

The nature of God's grace in salvation reveals the fact that he is a God of patience towards sinners. For those of you that are not in Christ, perhaps wondering if maybe you've just sinned too much, "Have I committed the unpardonable sin? Am I beyond hope? Can anything save me now in light of what I've done in my recent past?" Well, beloved, let this be your encouragement to come to Christ. He is patient and he is gracious and he is merciful to sinners just like you and just like he was willing to save Paul when Paul called out to him in faith, nothing's changed about Christ, he has that same patience; the example of Paul shows you that Christ will save even the worst of

sinner. You're not as bad as Paul. He saved Paul, therefore the logic goes, therefore the door is open wide for you to call upon Christ and ask him for grace. Isn't that wonderful that after years of carrying a hardened heart, that you could repent and know for certain that Christ will receive you even now? That's why the Gospel's good news. Good news to know that there's a Savior like that who will receive a guilty sinner like you. His patience is central to that.

Well, let's go on. Let's go back to Paul's testimony, going back to Acts 26 and see a second aspect of the nature of God's grace in salvation and the second thing that you see, I believe, as you read Paul's testimony is you not only see the patience of Christ, you also see the power of Christ. The power of Christ. Paul's testimony shows the power that Christ has to save sinners, to change them, to cause them to be born again, to make them someone completely new that they could never do on their own.

Look at Acts 26, beginning in verse 12. Paul says, "While so engaged," so engaged in his blasphemy and pursuit of those humble believers in the early days of the early church,

12 "While so engaged as I was journeying 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, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, '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 get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 rescuing you from the Jewish 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 dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

Now, among other things that you see in this passage, you see a manifestation of the great power of Christ to save sinners like you, to save sinners like Paul. Now today, the way that God works, he's appointed, is that he works through his word to convict people in their hearts as the Holy Spirit brings his great persuasive powers upon them. With Paul, he did something extraordinary. With Paul, he did something different that manifested the great power that is intrinsic in the person of Christ.

Look at this in verse 13 again. Christ appeared to him and appeared to him in a manifestation of his glory that was brighter than the sun. He appeared to him with a strong voice, a convicting persuasive voice with power saying, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Manifesting this great power, the glory that stopped Paul in his tracks. Paul was not stopped by any mere human intervention. Paul was a man of power, a man with authority delegated to him, a man of conviction, and Christ confronts him on the

road to Damascus and everything stops and everything changes. Do you see that this is far more than Paul changing his opinion about Christ? This is far more than the simplicity of saying, "Oh, I was a Jew, now I think I'll be a Christian." It wasn't like that at all, as though Paul's conversion was a manifestation of mere human power and human choice. The great power of God was brought to bear upon him. The great voice of Christ was brought to bear upon him and Christ manifests his power in saying that, "I've chosen you." By sovereign prerogative, Christ declares to Paul, "I have chosen you. You will be My servant now." And by sovereign power he sends him to the Gentiles and he says, "Paul, I'm going to use you in such a way," look at verse 18 with me, "that other men will turn from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God." Christ appears with power to Paul and trusts him with a Gospel which is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, Romans 1:16-17, and so great is this power of Christ that he can deliver men from their dominion and their slavery to the supernatural enemy known as Satan.

Jesus has the power to open spiritually blind eyes and give them sight, has the power to do that with physical eyes as well, did it in the Gospels. Jesus has the power to break into the stronghold of Satan and to deliver his captives. Jesus has the power to manifest himself in a way that is more blinding than looking at the sun. Jesus has the power to turn a man's heart to devotion to him that just moments before had been bound and committed to hatred and hostility against him. Do you see, beloved, the power of Christ? Do you see how his nature is on display in salvation? He is sovereign. He is great. He is majestic, and to take that majesty to a greater exponential level, understand this, my friends, that Christ exercises his power in order to show love to the people that he calls to himself. It's not just that he's great in the ways that we've been describing, it's not just that he's omnipotent over every visible and invisible thing in the universe, he's great like that but to think that the eternal Son of God who uses that power in order to show mercy and grace to sinners like you and me, what tongue is fit to describe such great majesties as that? Who is adequate to name forth the glory of one like that who is not only patient but is powerful as well?

Jesus Christ is the risen Lord of lords and King of kings and it was that great powerful Christ, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, may I remind you, it was him, it was him who went to Calvary to lay down his life as an atonement for sinners in offering a sacrifice, a blood sacrifice of his own innocent precious blood to be the sacrifice that was sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God against you. Great power and great patience joined together without compromise, without mixture, joined together in the person of Jesus Christ and all of that manifested in the testimony of Paul as his testimony reveals something of the nature of the grace of God in salvation.

Look over at Luke, if you would, Luke 24. Christ spoke about his authority, spoke about how his life and death and resurrection were in fulfillment of what had been said in prior centuries by the prophets who wrote the word of God and spoke the word of God. In Luke 24:44, he says, "Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to

understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'" Before he ascended, he said, "This will be the message that is taken to all of the nations." Now as he confronts Paul on the road to Damascus, he says, "I'm sending you to the Gentiles, I'm sending you to preach this message of repentance that they might turn to God and be delivered from the dominion of Satan." How great he is. How merciful he is. And now as a resurrected Lord, he calls men to himself for salvation.

What is the content of the faith that he calls us to? Understand, remember lest I leave something a shadow in your mind in the corner, understand and remember that there is nothing that you can do to buy your way into the favor of Christ. There is no work that you can do, there is no offering that you can make that will earn the favor of Christ. It is not by works that anyone finds this salvation of which we're talking about here today. You cannot save yourself. You must be born again. And Scripture says in Romans 10, what then is it? What then is it? How then do we link into, how do we access, how does this grace of God in salvation become ours? Scripture says over and over and over again, it is received by faith. It is received not as a work that you do but as an exercise of faith, of loving, yielded submission to this Christ of power and patience who is the one alone who can deliver you.

Look at Romans 10. Romans 10:8. As you turn there, the Bible is not first and foremost a book about morals and living a more moral life. The Bible brings a message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone by which a guilty sinner can be reconciled to God, not earn his way and have God owe him his due. It doesn't work that way. Romans 10:8 says, "What does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Faith. Believe. Confess Christ. This is the essence of what it means to come into a saving relationship with Christ. You come by humble faith. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Christ, I trust in You. I trust in nothing of myself. In fact, I need to be delivered from myself, and so I come to You, O Christ, and bow before You and confess You." Verse 10, "with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

You see the patience of Christ and the power of Christ so strong, so powerful, so mighty, so willing that he can save a man and he will save any man who comes to him in humble faith like this. He's not restrained by your prior past sins from saving you. He's not. Christian, he's not constrained by the sins in your Christian life to show mercy to you now. He's a God of mercy, a God of patience, and a God who has power to save and power to cleanse. This is good news. This is good news.

Well, there's one other aspect about the nature of the grace of God in salvation that we see in Paul's testimony if you'll turn back to Acts 26 as we wrap this up. It always amazes me how fast 60 minutes can go. Acts 26. You see thirdly and finally, the purpose of Christ. The purpose of Christ.

When Christ saves a man, he saves him with a purpose to use him. Salvation, as we're going to see in future messages in weeks down to come, in salvation God takes a man and saves him, oh yes, for sure, delivers him from the condemnation and guilt that is his that his sins deserve, but God does something in addition to that. God when he saves and forgives and cleanses a man, is simultaneously sanctifying him, setting him apart so that he would be an instrument of the purposes of God as he goes forth in the remainder of his life. The purpose of Christ in saving you is that you would be his servant henceforth, that you would be a servant of his glory, a servant of obedience, a servant of declaring his name, and the purpose of Christ shown in the life of Paul is evident. The Lord saved Paul to use him. Paul proved the reality of his conversion in his subsequent obedience to the Lordship of Christ.

Look at verse 19, Acts 26. It says in verse 19,

19 "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,
20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at
Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the
Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds
appropriate to repentance. 21 For this reason some Jews seized me in the
temple and tried to put me to death.

"It's because I was preaching repentance. Not because I had broken any laws of the kingdom, of the Empire. They just wanted to shut me up. There was no legal reason for me to be in prison these past two years, King Agrippa, but rather the Jews were simply trying to silence me. But now," verse 22,

22 ... having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to
small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was
going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of
His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both
to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

Paul says, "God saved me and sent me out with a purpose and I obeyed. I went to Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, went to the Gentiles proclaiming that which was simply in perfect conformity with the Scriptures of these Jews themselves that the Christ would suffer, that by resurrection from the dead He would proclaim light, He would proclaim salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike. King Agrippa, I haven't done anything but be a servant of Christ. They have no reasonable charge against me and that's why I'm not willing to submit to go to Jerusalem."

Christ sent Paul to the Gentiles and, beloved, I want you to see, to remember that God saves us, saves you and me to use us. Ephesians 2:10, you don't need to turn there. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." You see, when you understand the nature of God's grace in salvation, you realize now that you are living

for completely contrary purposes than what marked your life prior to Christ. Before, you were your own god, you were your own boss, you were your own sovereign and you could go and do whatever you wanted to do, but when God saved you by the patience of Christ, when God saved you by the power of Christ, by the Gospel of Christ, God's intent in saving you was to set you apart so that you would be an instrument in his hands to advance his kingdom and to serve his purposes as long as he gives you life and breath. Paul's life was a manifestation of that. There was a purpose in salvation, not simply to go to heaven instead of hell, you're set apart for the lofty noble purpose of being a slave, of being a servant, of being an instrument in the hands of your Lord, and a proper understanding of the nature of grace, the grace of God in salvation understands that. "I'm not my own." Paul said, "You're not your own. You've been bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body."

I'll let you read the rest of Acts 26 on your own. You'll find that those in Paul's audience refused to believe. They wanted nothing to do with it. Festus accused Paul of being insane. King Agrippa simply put him off, said, "Oh, you keep talking, you'll persuade me to be a Christian." But he didn't. It was just a ruse. It wasn't an earnest dealing with what Paul had to say, and how sad to think that those in Paul's audience had just heard the words of life, they had just heard the Gospel that would save their soul, and they accused the speaker of insanity and they dismissed him with a wave of a hand as though he was some clown in the court that had nothing of consequence for them to hear and to heed; just walked away from it to their everlasting doom. How sad.

Do you know what? I can't do anything about Festus or Agrippa, but those of you that are here that have resisted Christ and are still resisting him to this moment, I can plead with you one more time, plead with you again, don't repeat the mistake of Festus and say these are insane things that don't matter, that have no claim on my life that I don't care about. Even worse and even perhaps more likely in a room like this, don't continue in that hardened resistance that says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I've heard this before." This is the Gospel that can save your soul. This is the Lord Jesus Christ manifesting himself to you through his word and calling and offering his patience and grace to you one more time, maybe for the last time, and here you are with an opportunity to cry out from your heart, "Lord, I believe. Lord, I confess. Lord, I receive You. I bow my knee by faith to You. Save this unworthy soul just like you saved Paul and like you saved so many others in this room. Lord, I don't want to be left outside the kingdom. I don't want to be on the outside looking in with my nose pressed against the glass, looking at these joys when it's too late for me to respond. Lord, I'm asking You to save me now. With an unreserved humility and confession that I've never known before, Christ, I ask You to save me just like you've saved them. I've heard of Your patience, Your power, Your purpose, I want to belong to You." Will you do that? Will you come to Christ and be saved?

Let's bow together in prayer, shall we?

We come, O Christ, to thee. We thank You for Your work in the life of the Apostle Paul, for Your manifestation of patience, power and purpose to him. Those of us who know You, we thank You for the patience and power and purpose that You've manifested to us.

We appeal to Your patience, we appeal to Your love, we appeal to Your grace on behalf of those who have not yet bent the knee. Father, may You by the power of Your Holy Spirit pierce the darkness, open the blind eye, remove that stony cold heart and replace it with a heart of warm responsive flesh that yields to Christ and comes to Him for salvation. Won't you do that work, O God? All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down and helps us. All is vain unless there is a hidden work of Your Spirit in the heart, calling such one with power to Christ. It's beyond our ability to make that happen, O God, and so we ask You to manifest Your grace and patience in the hearts of many here today, those who will hear on subsequent media. We ask You, Father, to show forth now Your power, Your patience, and to extend the purpose of the Gospel to even more hearts as we close this time in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church, in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.