

Kingdom Persuasions

Acts 28:16-23

When the world considers the Christian faith, they have just about all of it upside-down, inside-out and backwards. A modern curriculum on philosophy asks the big questions of reason, truth and knowledge; but when the topic of faith comes up, the author writes: “Given that faith by its nature makes no claim to being logical, can it ever be considered rational?” This can be yours for a mere \$400!

It is ironically the Christian worldview alone that brings justification to thinking, logic, and wisdom. The world’s thoughts must be taken captive to Christ, and its wisdom recognized as foolishness. The message of the Bible is the message of the God of truth and righteousness, a God who is light, a God who cannot lie. We are taught that the witness of God is greater than the witness of man.

Yet we are not believers based exclusively upon sheer empty authority, like a bunch of robots or zombies. The authority of the Bible is the very highest. The Scriptures, God’s living inerrant Word, is autonomous, as independent as the God who has spoken. But the message, as we see in our text today, is given by preaching, teaching, testifying, speaking to others – all in an effort – and here is our word for today – to *persuade*.

Verse 23 finds Paul explaining or expounding, and doing so in a very solemn and testifying manner about the Kingdom of God. And what is he trying to do? Persuade his hearers concerning Jesus. Later, in verse 24 – some were persuaded, but others would not believe.

At the heart of faith – from the very term itself in both the Hebrew and the Greek – is the concept of being persuaded by truth; that this message is trustworthy; and that trust must involve – not only our thinking, our minds, but also our hearts – but it does not by-pass the mind!

We are never told in the Bible to turn off our brains in order to fellowship with God. Quite the contrary, the demands of the Lord our God is to love Him with all our minds. And see how satisfying is the message of the kingdom, of Jesus Christ, to the thoughts of our heads and hearts!

The message of the King is a salvation for the whole man; it does not lop off one part of us to make us fit into a scheme. But as we are going to see, our minds, our thoughts, our thinking, is as rebellious as the rest of our nature, and needs to be illumined, needs to be given eyes to see, needs to have rebel thoughts taken captive, which in themselves flee from the light. That is the theme for us today, as consider Kingdom Persuasions.

We saw last time in Paul's approach to Rome what Kingdom Living is about. Paul is provided for, made confident, safely born along by friends, all which issues in Kingdom praise and encouragement. And how Paul needs it!

He enters the great capital of the empire in verse 16. What a metropolis unlike any other! What beauty, wealth and power could be found in the great city of man's power and honor – the capital city, the eternal city it was called for its greatness – the home of not less than 1.3 million souls.

This is the great seat of Caesar and the Senate; and Paul – whose name means small – comes and preaches a greater city, a greater kingdom, a greater life, with, by far, a greater King. But there are opposing elements which he will address, and he does so after getting settled in, three days after verse 16.

We need to comment a little on this little verse on the way:

First, it is the last “We” passage of the Acts – with Luke being a part of all this. This dovetails with Paul’s prison epistles of Colossians and Philemon, as Paul delivers greetings from Luke. Col. 4.14 and Philemon 1:24. This is quite different from what we read in 2 Timothy of his being abandoned by nearly every friend – probably referring to a second imprisonment.

But a more fascinating question is here – look at the liberty Paul is given. How do we account for that? The best answer seems to be the nature of his case – being so flimsy, as we have seen from Festus back in chapter 26. In any event, his is no high-priority case. This seems best to explain such freedoms to have friends visit, as well as to hold meetings.

But there may be a limit on this, as he does not attend the dozen or so Jewish synagogues in Rome at the time. So this is the first of three days described, all placed here in his own rented quarters.

That brings us to the lead up of verse 23, in Paul inviting leading Jews to his new place. In verses 17-22, we find Paul seeking to remove two damaging suspicions against himself, and more importantly, his message. We might say he has two strikes against him.

The first is his chain – that was more than a red flag, right?

Can you imagine the questions raised by your elders being brought up to the front door of the church in the back of a police car? But these people didn't even know Paul!

But see how Paul addresses this before those he wishes to persuade them:

1. He is honest about the matter, and does not mislead or deceive or cover up.
2. His posture is defensive – not offensive; not an attack upon his beloved people, but against the efforts of unreasonable men – which the authorities saw through and would have let me go.
3. He refuses to be side tracked in a lesser matter and argue about the bad apples in Jerusalem. This is a temptation, to major on minors.
4. Lastly, he puts the whole matter in the right context – he is a prisoner of **hope** – even the hope of Israel.

We will come back to this later, but here observe two qualities in Paul – he is a man of principle and not a criminal, walking according to a higher call and concern.

Secondly, we learn of the bad reputation which Christians have by word of mouth.

Paul is a man of passion, demonstrating his love for his people, the Jews. Gordon Keddie calls this a sort of pre-evangelism, which sets the tone for hearing the good news.

The leaders indicate they had heard nothing from Judea which would speak ill of Paul. Why this is so, we do not know. News travelled slowly, perhaps. Their internet connection was dial up, maybe! Kidding!

Maybe his Jewish accusers had given up on the case of Paul.

But here another strike brought up: they heard nothing evil about Paul, but they heard much about the Christians, that EVERYWHERE they were spoken against, as a splinter group, a sect! This word means nothing more than how we use it to describe the Sadducees or the Pharisees – a sub-group within the 1st century Jewish religion.

The heavier matter is that CHRISTIANITY is spoken against everywhere, universally.

This teaches us an important lesson. When we share the Word of God with others, we are not usually the first to do so. And perhaps the testimony of others, have fouled things up very well, and left a bitter taste in their mouth. What do you do then? The only answer is the mouthwash of a true and sweet presentation of the Gospel. Sometimes we have to retrace and straighten out our hearers, in the errors they have been taught, or the misunderstandings or even twisting of Scripture they believe. The problem can be in the speaker, in the hearer, or both.

So be ready, says Peter, to give an answer to those who ask you about your hope. And here Paul is hope-filled, faithful and ready to impart both the gospel and himself. He is careful to remove any obstacles.

So now he does something else worthy of our following and imitating – he sets up a time and a place in order to stretch out and talk of all that is necessary to convey the message of the Bible. Don't we often try to persuade people in a little scrap of a way? We restrict ourselves as well others, and worst of all, the Spirit, from presenting the truth in a way where questions can be asked and answered, reflection and

consideration exercised, clarity and depth can be communicated. How should we change in order to reach people around us in our ministry?

So Paul has now this group, eager, ready to hear him. They are gathered – a large group. They set a whole day, from morning till evening. And doesn't it appear that Paul seems to be the one who is hosting and showing hospitality, with the help of his believing friends, old and new?

Consider now the three areas of great importance to our kingdom persuasion.

See the **manner** of the persuasion – solemnly testifying, explaining, using persuasive speech.

See the **basis** of the persuasion – nothing but the Word of God is mentioned – ‘from the Law of Moses and the Prophets’.

See the **content** of the persuasion – it was not a fancy argument, with heat but no light. No, see how it is centered on the King and the Kingdom; on Jesus and His hope-filled fellowship.

We have touched on the solemn testimony, the **manner** of Paul's ministry, within the last several weeks, so we will not labor this point long. This is, by the way, in fulfillment of God's promise back in 23:11. ... *the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."* (Act 23:11) God purposed Paul to be here, and the Lord Himself is the mover and shaker, leading us to these divine appointments.

But see as well the human part. Yes, it is the Lord who calls out of darkness in to light, out of death into life, out of a condemnation to His salvation. But he uses servants, His people, His ministers, to bring that precious seed. *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2Co 4:7)*

We dare not say that it is our presentation that gives new life. But neither are we to serve in a robotic way – barking out Bible verses as people pass by, or throwing gospel tracts at shoppers at the local mall. Solemnly, out of a conviction God’s truth and commands, out of knowing what is at stake – heaven and hell; out of the consideration of God’s own majesty, glory, greatness in salvation; and out of the greatest good done to such needy souls – we testify, we witness – to the wonderful Word of God.

Do we not all here have room for improvement? Are we thinking about this Gospel Call – a gracious call, a heavenly call, a holy call? Are we responding in obedience, seeing ourselves, as Paul did, a debtor to all? When was the last time you shared the gospel to someone? Let us pray God would move us to seek His lost, knowing He has a people who need to hear you, and who will respond to the invitation and command of these Glad Tidings of Great Joy.

Be like Paul, a prisoner of hope, who knows that we do not carry much out of this world. We leave behind just about everything. Even our most intimate connections are severed when we leave this world. What we do bring with us are those who we have won and disciplined for His kingdom.

Let us move quickly now to the **basis** of Paul's testimony and persuasion – the Old Testament.

It is not your Word, but the Lord's which breaks and binds up, wounds and heals, convicts and converts. The words and works and ways of men cannot abide forever., All we are all like grass which passes away, but His Word shall not pass away.

This Word-based testimony points to **two things** in particular – first are the promises and prophecies which point to Jesus as the Messiah. That Jesus would be a prophet like Moses; born in treacherous times, meek and gently, bringing new revelation and leading the people of God. The priesthood, the temple and especially the sacrifices all point to Jesus the Lamb of God, Jesus the Priest of priests, better than Aaron, who brings us all behind the veil of the Holy of Holies.

And recall the many specific prophecies – of Jesus' incarnation, home, birthplace, virgin-born, humble, called out of Egypt, not recognized, doing wonders, giving sight and hearing to the blind and deaf, coming to His temple suddenly, arriving on a foal of a colt, suffering for sinners, for their sins, being pierced, beaten, beard plucked out, whipped, rejected by men, tried by both the Jews and Gentiles, his clothes gambled for, killed among criminals, but with the rich in his burial, and rising again the third day.

The **second part** of the testimony has to do with the blessings of His kingdom which would come with Him. His coming would be one of great joy, peace, power, majesty, not for a few but for the world, for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The Lord spoke ahead of time to show His truth, power, wisdom and grace. He knows man's stubborn

unbelief, his slowness to trust, his ability to shut his eyes to such a great light. It is this life, this new relationship, this salvation now published so powerfully, that is anticipated in the Old Testament.

The Jews had a problem – they were notorious for looking backwards instead of forwards; to make Moses the highpoint of God’s Bible. But as important as he was, he was only a servant in the house. He points to another, as do all the prophets after him. Now Jesus is come, the Son over the house.

Great was the OT revelation of God under Moses, where the wonderful name of Yahweh stood out – the faithful, covenant keeping God. But a greater revelation has come in God the Son, who has made known to us an even more precious name – FATHER. What greater intimacy, spirituality, understanding, and fellowship is found in the New Testament. Not that these were all brand new; no. All these truths were present in the Old, but not in the same light or degree.

And here is Paul, in chains for the hope of Israel, exalting the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the sin-bearer, the atonement, the grave-killer, the One who says: “Death, I will be your Enemy!”

That brings us, as all good gospel presentations should do, to the **content** of Paul’s persuasion – King Jesus the Savior.

Verse 23 says he testified about the Kingdom of God and persuaded concerning Jesus. We find the same thing, notice, in the last verse of Acts, verse 31.

There is no kingdom without the Person and Work of Jesus. Jesus **is** the Kingdom, and that is why we can say the kingdom has come with His advent. He who was the Mediator of the OT people of God, has

appeared. And His kingdom, His gracious kingdom, glorious kingdom, eternal kingdom, holy kingdom, a kingdom of love, of heaven, of all the riches of all the fullness of the God who is all in all – has come in these last days.

And let us be quick to add, that as there is no Kingdom without Jesus, there is no Jesus without the Kingdom either. To have Him is to have His Kingdom. To have Him as Savior is to have Him as Lord. We are right to exalt the Gospel of the Kingdom because that speaks of door, or the entrance into our relationship with Christ and His free gift of eternal life. But this is only the door to something more.

We are not following Paul if we are only preaching the entrance of the soul into life, and not preaching and teaching and evangelizing to the new life of Christ in His Kingdom. There are many who want to keep that out of sight, who say that is adding to the gospel, and so water down the message, and soften the full rule of King Jesus, and the full life to which we are called.

But aren't we born to grow and to live? We don't remain infants, I hope. Have we not a King who is to be glorified, in every part of life? As Paul wrote the Colossians: "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus," (Col 3:17) And is this not the peak of what true living is all about?

But maybe that is the problem. We find it hard to persuade others of what we ourselves are not persuaded. We call on others to live for Jesus, to see themselves as His subjects, His property, as being not their own, and joyfully living for Him and His will. But are we doing so? Do they see this modelled in us? Are we like those in Hebrews?

Who joyfully accept even the plundering of their property, knowing you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven? (from Heb 10:34)

WE need to find our identity, not in ourselves or in what the world expects of us. It is finding who we are before His throne – and what does He call us? Lowly slaves? Minions? No! “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give to you the kingdom.” “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” – sons and daughters of the kingdom.

Let us be found faithful, true and bold to welcome others into this same hope and privilege. Let us be found persuading many into His Kingdom, by His grace and power, in the same way we came in. Even if 10 reject us, or 50, or 100; isn’t reaching even one soul fully worth our true and hearty effort?

I know you believe so; let us put feet to that faith. Amen.