

Title: The gospel on display pt.2  
Text: Acts 26.1-32  
Theme: A changed life and clear truth  
Series: Acts  
Prop Stmt: God uses the witness and testimony of his people to spread his gospel to people all over the world.

One of the popular ways that people view a church is through the lens of her programs. I do not blame people for that view because people have been taught to have that view by many churches. In an effort to help people and attract people, churches have developed programs to accomplish that. It is common for people to view a church as a building where a staff of people provide a variety of programs for people. The bigger the church, the greater variety of programs there are. Having a variety of ministries can be a very good thing. However, over time it is easy for the programs to become the church. What is it that holds the church together? It is her programs. Then along comes Covid-19. And the children's programs are affected and the student programs, and most of the adult programs, music programs, women's programs, men's programs, and sports programs. And the question that some people and some churches are asking is: If we do not have these programs, do we even have a church? What if Covid-19 remains as a problem for a couple of years before a vaccine can be developed and we have to curtail many of the programs? Can we function as a church?

The book of Acts answers that question for us and the answer is, absolutely we can function as a church. A healthy church is not held together by programs but by the gospel. Programs are not sticky enough to hold a church together, because programs are vulnerable to things that change, like coronaviruses. However, the gospel is the means by which we become followers of Christ, the gospel is what defines us and the gospel is what grows us and matures us. We are brought together, held together and grown together by the gospel. So, what is essential for a church? The preaching of the gospel and the cultivating of gospel relationships. Cultivating gospel relationships is another way of saying, discipleship or helping one another follow Jesus better or helping one another get home safely.

Covid may affect our ability to carry on some of our ministries as we have in the past. At this point, we simply do not know but it will not hurt the church because the gospel is not at the mercy of Covid. The heart of a church is people who believe the gospel, who are growing in the gospel, and who are helping others believe the gospel and grow in the gospel. In our text, we see how the gospel is displayed in the life of Paul and how he shares the gospel and calls others to believe it. This is a beautiful display of the gospel. As you listen to this sermon, I want you to ask yourself three questions: 1) How do I share the gospel? 2) How do I encourage other believers to share the gospel? 3) How do other believers encourage me to share the gospel?

Read Text:

The church is intended by God to display the gospel through the changed and changing lives of her people. Therefore, God's desire for our church is that his gospel be put on display in your life and in our lives together. This morning I am going to focus more on you and not as much on us.

## I. **God displays the gospel through a changed life.** (9-11)

The gospel is more than propositional truths to assent to. There are truths that you must know, agree with and assent to, but the gospel is more than an intellectual grasp of information. The gospel is about Jesus and Jesus changes people from the inside out. The change that Jesus makes displays the gospel because it displays what kind of a gospel it is. The gospel is personal. It changes people. It is powerful. It changes people in a radical way and it changes really bad people from their evil and really “good” people from the evil of their self-righteousness. Changed lives set the stage for gospel conversations because a changed life raises obvious questions. In Paul’s story we see some of the things that changed in his life.

### A. **Changed beliefs**

“*I myself was convinced...*” (v.9) This is what I believed. I believed that Jesus and the followers of Jesus were the enemy. This clearly changed for Paul. Now, in his case, it is interesting to see what in his beliefs did not change. Paul previously believed in the OT and as a Pharisee he believed in the doctrine of the resurrection. That did not change. He still believed in the OT and he still believed in the doctrine of the resurrection, but what changed is that he now believed that Jesus rose again from the dead. He had to, Jesus appeared to him. Jesus did not give him a choice in the matter, right? Paul had to change his beliefs, but in so doing, he now understood what the OT was all about. He still believed in the OT, but now he believed in it better because he now understood that the OT pointed to Christ, was about Christ and was fulfilled in Christ. His changed beliefs resulted in changed desires.

### B. **Changed desires**

Instead of hating and opposing Christians, he now loved them. The people he longed to destroy, were the very people he longed to encourage and help. The movement he wanted to stop, was now the movement he wanted to advance. Changed beliefs and desires were evidenced in...

### C. **Changed actions**

In v.19, Paul says that when he arrived in Damascus, that instead of attacking the Christians, he began to preach the gospel. What he did in Damascus, he did in Jerusalem, Judea and then to the Gentiles. His entire life from that point on was about the gospel and advancing the church.

This chapter is the account of how Paul told Festus, Agrippa and Bernice the gospel and how it changed his life. So, before we go on in this sermon, I should ask you this question: If you think of yourself as a follower of Christ, what makes you think that you are? Do you know the gospel? If someone were to ask you what it means to be a follower of Christ could you explain that to them? You were not born believing the gospel. You had to learn it. You had to believe it and you had to surrender yourself to it. Do you believe it and is there evidence in your life of that? Do you live with a fundamental desire to please God and honor him, or do you live fundamentally to please yourself? And what about your actions? If anyone watched your life, would they see a fundamental love for others? Do you love others? Is there a love of and a pursuit of righteousness, a commitment to self-denial, humility, a hunger for holiness? Does joy, peace,

goodness and self-control mark your life? God displays the evidence of the gospel through a life that is changed from the inside.

## **II. God displays the gospel through a clear story.**

A changed life begs the question – what happened to you? Or, why are you like that? There is a guy from our church who was at work when a bunch of guys were looking at some porn and were telling him to come and look at it with them and he said no. He didn't preach at them, he just wouldn't do it, so they mocked him and tried to force him to look and it got physical, but he wouldn't do it. One of the guys who was watching all of this was curious as to why this guy was that way and he was told, that he was a Christian. Now, did our brother defend the textual historicity of the Bible? No. Did he provide a compelling argument for the fallacy of evolution? No. Did he prove the existence of God and given ironclad proofs of the resurrection of Christ? No. He lived differently than his world and while some were angered and some mocked, there was at least one who was intrigued by it and wanted to know why. There was something different about this guy. He was willing to not only not do something that everyone else was doing, but it was something that everyone did, but not him and he was willing to endure abuse for it. When you live differently, some will mock you, some will hate you, but some will want to know why and I want you to be ready for them. You can and should love and pray for the mockers and haters, but it is generally fruitless to argue with them. But, I want you to be ready for those who ask. In a way, that is the position that Paul is in here. The change in his life has given him an opportunity to share the gospel. The way that Paul shares the gospel is a great example of how you can do it.

### **A. What I used to be and do (4-11)**

I used to be a very devoted religious guy who was so zealous I hunted down Christians, put them in jail and in many cases helped arrange for them to be killed. As an aside, this is interesting how what Paul used to do is now being done to him, right? It's not karma. It's evidence of the intensity of the hatred that these Jewish leaders had against Christians. I also think it was one of the reasons why Paul never hated them even though they hated him. He used to be one of them and he knew that if God could change his life, that God could change some of them. He does not glory in his sin, but he does not hide what he used to be and what he used to do.

### **B. What happened (12-18)**

Paul then explains how he came to faith in Christ. He tells them about his experience on his way to Damascus. Now, can he prove this actually happened? No. It is possible that some of the guys who were with him on that trip, who witnessed something were still living and could be called upon to testify, but even then, Festus, Agrippa and Bernice would not know "for sure" if that actually happened unless they had witnessed it themselves. But, what they can all agree upon is that Paul is different. Paul makes it very clear that the change that took place all had to do with Jesus. That is our mission. Look for opportunities to let people know that what matters to us and why we are different. It is all because of Jesus. I will say more about this in the 3<sup>rd</sup> point.

### **C. What I think and do now (19-20)**

Paul then tells them about the difference that Christ has made. What he says about his life (his words) matches with his life. This is what we saw in point 1. Now, so far, much of what Paul has said is simply telling his story. Telling your story not only answers the question of what happened to you or why do you live the way you do, but in many cases, it will lead to an opportunity for you to explain the gospel. This is what Paul does. He gets to the gospel.

Your life and your experience will not save anyone, but the gospel will. Your life and experience may be used by God to get their attention, to ask questions and give you an opportunity to share the gospel with them, but ultimately, people need to hear the gospel. I have heard many people quote St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." There are two problems with that. 1) Francis never said that. There is nothing in his writings or sermons where he ever used those words. I understand the sentiment of those words, and that is what the first point of this sermon emphasized, but there is no record of Francis ever saying this. The second problem is that the gospel is inherently verbal. It is impossible to preach the gospel without using words. Romans 10:13-15 works backwards from the point at which someone believes and lays out the process. "*For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" Will people do that because you are a nice neighbor who keeps a weed free yard, or helps others by snow-blowing and loaning tools? No. "*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?*" The witness of your life is to help open doors for your words. We are to live lives that faithfully express the fruit of the gospel so that we will honor God and so we can explain to people the root of the gospel.

### III. God displays the gospel through compelling truth. (22-23)

Even as Paul told the story of his conversion, he articulated the content of the gospel. You have heard me do this numerous times in many Sunday sermons, wedding and funeral sermons as well. When we have a new members' class and different staff members or elders come in, I ask them to do the same thing. Explain the gospel in about 60 seconds. I encourage you to follow a simple 4-point outline: God, man, Christ, response. (repeat)

**God** created us for his glory, his pleasure and our pleasure, his joy and our joy and for our good. **We** are made in his image and were made to be in a happy relationship with God, but we rebelled. Every single one of us has rebelled. We have gone our own way, made up our own rules, and have attempted to live our own lives apart from God. Our rebellion is called sin. And because God is holy and just, our sin, our rebellion, our treason has to be punished. But, because of our sin nature, we cannot offer up anything to God that would satisfy his justice. In and of ourselves we have no hope to be anything other than condemned before God and we have no excuse. However, God is not only just, God is merciful and he provided the way for us to be rescued from our condemnation and be restored to a loving relationship with him. That way is through his Son, **Jesus**. Jesus, who was fully God and fully man lived on this earth not only as a teacher and worker of miracles. He came to be our Savior. He came to live the life that we couldn't live which qualified him to be the sacrifice we would never offer. The wages of sin is death. The sentence for our treason is capital punishment. We deserve to die for our sins, but Jesus did that for us. He offered up his perfectly righteous life in our place and by dying for us,

he paid for the sins of every single person who would ever believe on him. He then rose from the dead 3 days later proving that what he said was true and proving that the payment he made was accepted. Anyone who hears this message and **turns** to Jesus and trusts in him will never be turned away. Jesus calls us to turn away from our sin and to trust in what he has done (not in what we do) but in what he has done and put our faith in him and submit to his rule and reign in our lives forever. He is worth it. Will you trust in him?

You can see this same basic outline in what Paul says. Because Agrippa is a Jew and is familiar with the OT, Paul can and does assume the first two points – God and man. Agrippa is also very familiar with Jesus because Agrippa is the king of the Jews and was alive during the time that Jesus was alive. That is why Paul focuses upon the resurrection in his brief speech because the resurrection of Christ is proof positive that what Christ claimed his true. At the end Agrippa gets it, doesn't he? He realizes the point that Paul is making. This is truth that you have to believe. This truth demands a response. Agrippa cannot provide an argument that would dispute the truth of the gospel The only thing he can do is attempt to put it off. But the gospel demands a response and it is right and loving of us to ask people what they are going to do about the gospel.

#### IV. **God displays the gospel through convicting appeal.** (24-29)

##### **A. Personal**

Now, pause the movie for a second. Look at verses 26-27. Here is a prisoner, standing in a royal courtroom and is speaking boldly to the king. Is he a risk-taker, precocious type? No, he simply knows that Jesus is real and the gospel is true and he can say it with confidence because he knows that everyone who believes in Christ will be saved and he wants everyone to believe in Christ. So, he makes the appeal personal – King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe. That is a fascinating statement isn't it? I know that you believe the prophets. You cannot be here at this time in the history of the Jewish nation and not believe the prophets, but I want you to believe in what they prophesied about and pointed to. They pointed to Jesus. Do you believe like that? Will you believe like that? Will you trust in Jesus? That is pointed.

##### **B. Pointed**

Agrippa did not believe that day. Perhaps he did later, or perhaps not. But, at the end of the session Agrippa knew that even though he was the king, he was not in line with God, but he could be. What a mercy of God to use Paul to let him hear that. What a kindness of Paul to be willing to boldly say that.

Conclusion: We are ambassadors. We live in a foreign country and the church is our embassy that represents our true home. Our purpose here is to represent our king and his interests. As we live, we look for ways to inform people about our home-land and our true King. Our home-land, is the real home and our true King is the true King. Your changed life will give you opportunities to share your life and story which will give you opportunities to explain the gospel, which demands a response. I want you to be ready to do this and eager to do this.

1. Practice telling one another your story by asking each other, how did you come to faith in Christ. We really should know each other's stories.
2. Practice telling one another the gospel in 60-90 seconds.
3. Pray for opportunities to do this with others. This should be at the top of our prayers. I am convinced that the reason why Paul was always ready for these opportunities is because he prayed like this all the time.

Not long ago a man told a girl in our church how he came to faith in Christ. He said, it started at work, when there was this guy (and he said his name) who was abused by the other guys for his faith. I knew then there was something different about him and years later I heard the gospel and trusted Christ. The gal said, I think I know him. I think he is a member of my church. He is. Beloved your life matters. Your life and your words can change people forever, because they can point to the One who does the changing.