“Almost Convinced”

9/24/2017

I Peter 1:1-11

Please take your Bible with me and open to Acts 26.

“This car will keep both you and your family safe. As matter of fact, if you’re in an accident, you’re very likely going to walk away.”

“Camry’s are still the most reliable cars on the road today. You probably already know somebody who’s got one and loves it. I predict you will love this one.”

“People who drive our vehicles stay with us because of our service.”

“And you’ll be amazed how easily you can connect your phone to this car’s Bluetooth.”

 “People tell us that our paperwork is the simplest they’ve ever seen.”

“We match any other price in South Bend.”

“You can take this one for the weekend. See if you like it.”

When was the last time you were persuaded by these sorts of gems from a car salesman? Probably every one of us.

Everybody’s been persuaded to make a purchase at some time; even when you had no intention of buying. And why is that? Because sales people are persuaders. They get paid to persuade; and to persuade you. When that salesman convinces you that you’d be better off with this specific car, you’re hooked and you’ll go home in *that* car. *And*, you’ll leave the dealership thinking you’re in much better shape than when you got there.

Surprisingly, I discovered a salesman in the Bible. Yet, this salesman wasn’t selling his usual supplies. What with me a man in action with words that are neither manipulative nor impressive; just simple and straightforward. And he got this response. “You almost persuaded me.”

The story is right here in Acts 26. So, I decided to title today’s sermon “Almost Convinced.” Shall we pray?

As you know, the Bible is filled with stories; storied about people. Actually your Bible has the stories of nearly 3,000 people. The Holy Spirit recorded each one for you and for me.

Today’s is about a king; a Roman King. His name is Agrippa. His full name was Marcus Julius Agrippa. He was a junior. He had the exact same name as his dad. And he ruled Samaria, Galilee, Perea, and Judea; the seventh and last of the Herods (48 A.D. – 100 A.D.). And just one thing more. Agrippa’s girlfriend was actually his half-sister. Her name was Bernice. And Bernice had already been married to another Roman leader named Herod of Chalcis, which was actually her uncle.

So, with that in mind, here in Acts 26, Paul’s been held by the Roman Governor Festus and now brought to King Agrippa II. And he’s been given the opportunity to defend himself; verse one.

Acts 26:1 *“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: (2) I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:*

*(3) Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. (4) My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;*

*(5) Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. (6) And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers:*

*(7) Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. (8) Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*

*(9) I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. (10) Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.*

*(11) And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. (12) Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests …”*

One of the greatest things about the Bible is preservation. God has preserved history for us. Here we have the history of a man who was quote unquote “tried” in three courts; thus far, before two Roman Governors and now before a Roman king. That man is Paul. And each time he was given the opportunity to speak, Paul does the following. He preaches the resurrection of Christ and he gives his personal testimony of how he came to know the LORD.

Now, folks, you, like Paul, don’t know in advance how God is going to use your personal salvation testimony. So, you need to be ready with it at any moment to simply tell people that God has changed your life. We know Paul was a man with a mission. But his mission was simple; tell the Good News that Jesus Christ died and rose again wherever and whenever anyone would listen.

So, Paul’s in court today; again. And what does he do? He simply tells the truth.

You likely have more opportunities that you know to give your testimony. And when you have that opportunity, give them your testimony. Were you religious before you came to the LORD? Were you simply a hard-working moral man or woman who minded your own business? Was it in a Church building or in a movie theater that you heard the message of Christ? What happened on the day you were saved?

Why? Because everyone you know loves a story. And *your* story is the most important story you will ever tell. Master your story. And just like Paul, tell it over and over. Before I came to Christ, I was a bit of a wild teenager. It was easy for me to get in trouble at home, at school, or with the law. I was often in a fight with someone.

Yet, God graciously, had someone say to me, “Danny, (that’s what my brother and sisters still call me), “Do you want to go to the movies with me?” I did. I went. And I heard at the movie theater what I had not heard in Church.

Today I want to say something about being persuasive. Your story is probably the most persuasive thing you have to share with anyone. Don’t lose those opportunities.

I spoke with a woman just a few weeks ago. And after just a few minutes, she said “My first husband died. I re-married. And, later, my second husband also died.”

It’s like “that’s her story.” Now, at his stage in her life, where is she in her relationship with the LORD? Share life and then share His life with them.

Folks, everybody likes a story. And since you have Paul three times, before three Roman leaders, telling the same story; shouldn’t you?

And what was the effect of Paul’s story before King Agrippa II, king over Samaria, Galilee, Perea and Judea? As you are about to see, he is “almost convinced” to become a Christian.

But let me remind you of one more thing. People need the LORD. They may *think* they need a lot of other things. But over everything else, they need the LORD. And your testimony just might be the thing that God will use to move someone from darkness to light; from condemnation to salvation; from hard-heartedness to forgiveness.

Now, what is it that convinces? What was it that nearly persuaded this Roman King to become a Believer in Jesus Christ?

As I thought through Acts 26, here’s what I saw. Here are the things that Paul was using to convince King Agrippa.

First, Paul’s sincerity; verse two.

Acts 26:2 *“I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching [concerning] all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: (3) Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.*

*(4) My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; (5) Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.”*

How can you compete with sincerity? It’s one of the keys to success; especially success in relationships. And it’s a huge part of believability. That’s how relationships succeed.

Now, I realize that there are plenty of people who are sincerely wrong. I’ve met many, just like you.

Now, think of it like this. Agrippa is a Jew. And do you think Agrippa knew the Jewish leaders that had made accusations against Paul? And further, do you think Agrippa was in any way convinced that the Pharisees were sincere people?

Here’s one of Ben Franklin’s “Thirteen Virtues.” “Virtue # 7: Sincerity: Use no hurtful deceit. Think innocently and justly, if you speak, speak accordingly.” Think of how great your impact is upon people who see and hear you to be a sincere person.

And how does Paul convey his sincerity? He says “I’m happy.” This is same word Jesus used when He said “Blessed are the …” It means he was in a very God-blessed position. Now, Paul was under Roman house-arrest. And now he’s before the Roman King over Palestine. And many would say he had no reason to count himself happy. But that’s not how Paul saw it.

So, first, Paul’s sincerity was convincing.

Second, Paul’s confidence. Look again with me at verse six. Acts 26:6 *“And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers: (7) Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.”*

Folks, it’s a simple question. What it is that you have your hope in? Is it hope in the promise of God? And what had God promised? He had promised a Messiah. And now the Messiah had come. So, Paul, once a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Now, a man of tremendous confidence. He was trusting the One Who promises and keeps His promises.

Folks, it’s hard to not be convinced by a sincere and hopeful person. Paul was both.

What was convincing and nearly convinced Agrippa to become a Believer? First, Paul was sincere. Second, Paul was confident. Third, Paul was convinced regarding the resurrection; verse eight.

Acts 26:8 *“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”*

Agrippa, remember, was Jewish. He knew that the OT taught resurrection. He also had likely heard that Christians had a hard and fast conviction that their Messiah had risen from the dead.

Now, there are plenty of people in your life that will accept the fact that you are quote “religious” or a quote “good Christian.” But when you are in a conversation with them and you convey your conviction that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, it’s likely that aspect of your belief system will polarize you.

And the truth is that the most polarizing aspect of Christianity and the thing that sets Christianity apart from any other teaching on the entire planet is the resurrection. Folks, without the resurrection, nothing about Christ holds any water.

So, when you are given the opportunity, tell someone about the resurrection this week and note their response. You see, folks, if Jesus did rise from the dead, then, He’s alive. And everything He did and all He said becomes more than a mere story that you were taught when you were a child. Now, He’s alive. And your hearer will be affected by that one fact of history.

Let me remind you here of a sermon once preached by a man named Peter. Here’s how much conviction he had regarding the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 2:29 *“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. (30) Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;*

*(31) He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. (32) This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

*(33) Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. (34) For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,*

*(35) Until I make thy foes thy footstool. (36) Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

You see, if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then He was not nor will He ever be the Jewish Messiah. Peter and the other Apostles knew that. And Paul knows that. And now, Paul’s conviction that Jesus did rise from the dead is one of the things that nearly convinced Agrippa to turn to Christ.

First, Paul was sincere.

Second, Paul was confident.

Third, Paul was convinced regarding the resurrection.

Fourth, Paul claims to know Jesus personally; verse nine.

Acts 26:9 *“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. (10) Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.*

*(11) And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. (12) Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,*

*(13) At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.*

*(14) And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks [goads].”*

If I came to you today and told you that I had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and that He spoke to me, would you receive it? Would you believe it? Or, would you think I was crazy?

You see, having a personal relationship with the resurrected Jewish Messiah is very polarizing. He’s either alive or He’s dead. It’s that simple. It’s either a historical fact or it’s a myth. Either you know Him personally or you don’t. Which is it for you?

For Paul, it was a significant part of his testimony to say that he has a personal relationship with the Promised Jewish Messiah.

First, Paul was sincere.

Second, Paul was confident.

Third, Paul was convinced regarding the resurrection.

Fourth, Paul claims to know Jesus personally.

Fifth, Paul was knowledgeable. He knew exactly what the Bible taught; verse 22. Acts 26:22 *“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: (23) That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”*

If there is one thing that the world around you, your family, your friends, those you work with, need to know, it’s this Book. The Bible and prayer were removed from the public school system back in 1962 and 1963. That Supreme Court ruling has probably had the most spiritually detrimental effect upon the United States of America, than any other decision other than Roe vs. Wade.

Why? What kind of nation are we living in today, fifty-five years later? Should I list for you the impact upon our society? It’s obvious, isn’t it? We have completely lost our way and there is no moral foundation for the family, for business, for education, and for the Church in America today.

Paul’s knowledge of the OT is extremely powerful. Your understanding of the Bible is extremely powerful. Folks, without your Bible, you really don’t have any convincing arguments to persuade your loved ones to come to Christ. But, with the Bible, you have the most secure and the most solid a foundation.

First, Paul was sincere.

Second, Paul was confident.

Third, Paul was convinced regarding the resurrection.

Fourth, Paul claims to know Jesus personally.

Fifth, Paul was knowledgeable.

Sixth, Paul was reasonable and truthful; verse 24.

Acts 26:24 *“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. (25) But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

*(26) For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.”*

Every time Paul spoke that day; every time he responded; everything he said, his salesmanship notwithstanding, Paul was convincing.

St. Augustine of Hippo once said *“The truth is like a lion; you don’t have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself.”*

Folks, you do not have to defend the Bible. It’s its own defense. It comes directly from the heart of God. You may hear people say that God spoke to them. And you may doubt it. But, whenever they say “The Bible says,” you can be sure that the lion of truth can never be caged in.

First, Paul was sincere.

Second, Paul was confident.

Third, Paul was convinced regarding the resurrection.

Fourth, Paul claims to know Jesus personally.

Fifth, Paul was knowledgeable.

Sixth, Paul was reasonable and truthful; verse 24.

Seventh, Paul was persuasive; verse 27.

Acts 26:27 *“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. (28) Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

*(29) And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. (30) And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:*

*(31) And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. (32) Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.*

How many times have your family members or friends heard the message of Christ and, like Agrippa, been “almost persuaded”?

Folks, “Almost persuaded” means that you think you know more than God, more than the Bible, and more than the Christian man telling you the Gospel.

Let me close with this. Something terrible happened to King Herod Agrippa’s dad, Herod Marcus Julius Agrippa I in 44 A.D. Does anyone here know what happened to him? Does anyone know how he died?

The story of his death is found in your Bible. Here it is Acts 12:20 *“And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.*

*(21) And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. (22) And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. (23) And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.”*

You might have thought that a man whose father had been publicly slain by an angel for his pride and his refusal to give God glory and a man who had had the greatest Christian to ever live give very persuasive arguments for believing on Christ, would have gladly received the LORD as his Savior. But, he did not.

Now you, you too have heard the greatest Christian ever, the Apostle Paul, give seven very convincing reasons to believe. And yet, like these two Roman kings with the exact same name, you might only say in response “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

Folks, your sin is the only thing between you and God. And it’s the most powerful thing that stands between you and God. Yet, in His love, He’s right now giving you an opportunity to be saved. So, what will it be? Will you choose the two Herod’s answer? Or, will you receive Jesus Christ as your LORD and Savior today? It’s the choice of a lifetime. Today is the Day of Salvation. What will you do?

So, if you’ve never repented and received Jesus Christ as your Savior, today is the day you need that. You need to do it today and not wait until someone more persuasive comes along. What do you need to do? Today you need to Repent and to Believe.

* To Repent = I change my mind about God, Christ, my sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.
* To Believe = I simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for my sins.

Here’s the Salvation Prayer*.* Pray this prayer along with me. *“LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and deserve judgment for my sins. I believe Jesus died in my place on the Cross to remove that judgment. Please save me today. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”*

Shall we pray?

Now let’s sing Hymn # 527 “I Know Whom I Have Believed”

1. **Herod the Great** who ordered the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem. [Matt 2:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%202.16-18) He died in BC 4.2.
2. **Herod Antipas**. [Matt 14:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2014.6-10). He ordered John the Baptist to be beheaded.
3. **Herod Philip 1**. [Mark 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%206.17). The father of Salome and the husband of Herodias, who left him for his half-brother Herod Antipas.
4. **Herod Philip 2**. [Luke 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%203.1). He married his younger relative, Salome, whose dance lead to John’s beheading.
5. **Herod Agrippa 1**. [Acts 12:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2012.21-23). It was he who put James to death. He died the unpleasant death of being eaten by worms.
6. **Herod Agrippa 2**. [Acts 25:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2025.13). Paul was tried before him.