



way
of
life

Peter and Paul absorbed the reality of God that comes from our salvation in Jesus Christ. They worked to translate that reality to the world in a number of powerful sermons in the book of Acts. Through our series, **Way of Life**, we'll be looking at these powerful sermons and how they call us to action. Early Christians were known as "People of the Way," as though they were fighting for a new way of life. They were advocating for a way of life, but that way of life is Jesus Himself. Presenting Jesus as Savior and Lord competes with the alternative ways of life presented in culture. By digging into these sermons in Acts, we will see how the way of Jesus is better than any alternative offered by the world.

THE WAY IS JESUS • Acts 26:19-29 • Tim McConnell • October 16, 2016

The way of life is Jesus. Jesus is the way of life. Notice I don't say "a way" but "the way." There are an awful lot of patterns we call "ways of life," but if you are looking for life, the life that is truly life, it is found in Jesus. I spent two summers in college volunteering with a youth ministry on Martha's Vineyard. I know. Some of us have to suffer for Jesus. On Martha's Vineyard, the traffic can get awful, so the locals are always talking about alternative routes. "I know you can go that way, but can't you also get there by cutting through this neighborhood or that township...?" I was not a local, so I found myself saying, "I don't know about that. But I do know this, if you go down Edgartown Road, you will eventually get to Edgartown." That's a simple illustration only to say: Jesus has made a way of life. I don't know about anything else, but I do know this, if you will follow Jesus you will have life and life eternal. Jesus is the Way of Life—and in Him, we have freedom from death and purpose in life. Jesus is the way.

I know it can be frustrating in a time of sophistication and multiculturalism to have a pastor who says "Jesus is the way," but here we must stand. It is sometimes called the "scandal of particularity" that Jesus is the only way. Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) "I am the way," He said, not suggesting any others. And then He added, so to close the door to any confusion, "no one comes to the Father except through me." He stated it positively: "I am the way," and then negatively: "there is no other" so that we would understand fully that life is found in Jesus. And it is a scandal, it is a scandalous truth. In fact, in a pluralistic society there may be no greater crime than to suggest that there is only one way to God. But let me say, this is not an unreasonable idea. God has opened a gateway to salvation through the remarkable sacrifice of His own son, Jesus, on the cross. This is open to all who would call on Him in faith. Now do we indict God for being close-minded? If you were suffering a horrid disease, or your child were, and a doctor came along and offered a cure to save your child's life—only take this pill, only drink this medicine—do you then turn and indict the doctor for close-mindedness? "I'd prefer a few choices, and I like my medicine to taste like bubblegum please!" If you are on a single-engine commuter plane over an island, do you indict the pilot for choosing the landing strip to land the plane? "You're a very close-minded pilot, sir. Why don't we try those woods, or that hillside, or that rocky beach?" No. You are grateful for a pilot who can see where life is preserved and carries your sorry sack safely to the ground! But we would complain to God that there is only one way home to Him—the way of Je-

sus. I think we fear a feeling of superiority. "I've found a way and my way is better." But don't you know? This is not the way you found, but the way God found you. There is no superiority when we are sinners saved by grace, when we are simple beggars trying to share with another where to find bread. Well, it is my duty and responsibility to teach as Jesus did, and it would be no service to you for me to tell you other than what Jesus clearly told his disciples—Jesus said, "I am the way."

It is in the spirit of this very same boldness and humility that Paul stands before Agrippa today. Paul is in chains, under charges, and awaiting transport to Rome. Paul was a Roman citizen and Roman citizens had the right, when they were charged with a crime somewhere in the far territories, to appeal to Rome. If they didn't think they were getting a fair shake with a regional governor, they could appeal to Caesar and have the case tried in Rome. Paul has already appealed to Caesar, so this is not really a trial here today. But Paul is trucked out in front of King Agrippa by Festus the Procurator of Judea who is trying to make an impression on the king. Agrippa is Herod Agrippa II, the last (as it would turn out) in the line of Jewish Kings working for the Roman occupation from the family of Herod the Great. Jewish by birth, but raised and educated in Rome, Agrippa was probably more Roman than Jewish at this point, but Paul sees an opportunity; an opportunity to share once again, even as he stands there in chains to proclaim, as Paul says, to "testify to small and great alike" that Jesus is the way of life, and in Him we have freedom from death and purpose in life.

There's a lot that could happen to Paul here. Paul has appealed his case, and now must go to Rome by law, but the case could be a long way toward resolved by the time the trial comes if these men were on his side. But Paul has no interest in making a case for his defense. Eugene Peterson says Paul's defense was no defense at all: "Rather, it was an offense, an invasion of the courtroom with the message of the gospel. What Paul did was preach a sermon. Paul was supposed to be defending himself, persuading King Agrippa of his innocence, but instead, he addressed the king in personal terms and attempted to persuade him of his need for a Savior." (The Message Study Bible) And why not, if Jesus is the way of life? Why not if Jesus, and Jesus alone, brings freedom from death and purpose in life? I want you to take courage and boldness from Paul here. He is standing in chains before great powers, but his message is Jesus. He goes on offense. I think we are too often playing defense when God is calling the offense out on the field. Jesus said, "I will build my

church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18 ESV). Now, tell me, are gates offensive or defensive battlements? Hell is on defense; the church is on offense. Paul addresses Agrippa with a mind to persuade, with an agenda to change his soul, with an intention to see Agrippa transformed by the love and grace of Christ—he goes on offense. But Festus pipes up and raises the gates, "You have gone insane, Paul." Let me tell you, dark powers are desperate to raise gates high enough to keep out the light of Christ, evil forces are desperate to raise walls in spiritual places, strongholds and fortresses, to ensure the name of Jesus does not penetrate, that the good news of freedom from death and purpose in life found in Jesus does not get to the minds of the lost—but they shall not prevail. Church of Christ, we are meant to be on offense not defense. Too often we play defense: "You can't say that about God," "You can't say that about the Bible," "You shouldn't say that about Christians." Stop sending the defense out on the field when God is calling for the offense.

Paul looks at Agrippa and sees opportunity for the Gospel. "Agrippa," Paul says, "God preserved my life for this moment." As the Scripture offers, "But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike." (Acts 26:22) "To small and great alike," Paul says, so that Agrippa knows he's not out of range. In fact, he's the target! This message is for you. The Gospel of Christ calls everyone to repentance. As John Calvin wrote of this moment, "Christ gathers everyone in the same embrace, so that those who used to lie in the gutter and are now raised to such honor may rejoice in His unmerited goodness, and so those who are in high places may willingly humble themselves, and not think their brothers beneath them—so that they be made God's children." (Commentary on Acts). Agrippa is equally in need of the way of life found in Jesus—a way of life that gives freedom from death and purpose in life. Let's get into that more now.

The core of Paul's argument, the sum of it, is verse 23. Starting back in 22, "I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen..." (Acts 26:22) Our teaching is bankrupt when we leave the Scriptures behind and launch off on our own. Then here it is: "that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to His own people and to the Gentiles." (Acts 26:23) That's it. John Calvin also mentions "the principal points of Paul's argument were that it is Christ's special task to atone for the sins of the world by His death and to obtain righteousness and life for us by His resurrection... The word 'light' includes whatever makes for perfect happiness, just as 'darkness' means death and every kind of wretchedness...the light of life was to spread

from Judea to the Gentiles" (Commentary on Acts). Freedom from death, and purpose in life. That's what's offered in Jesus. That's what we find when we walk the Way of Life in Jesus. That's the Way of Life.

Freedom from death—"that the Messiah would suffer" and "rise from the dead." We have a suffering Messiah, a suffering Savior, not a conquering king by power and might, but one who conquered by giving His life away to save ours. Jesus died on the cross. The Messiah suffered and died on our behalf, so that we could have freedom from death. "Oh, there you go!" says the cynic. "There it is. Christians can't handle the reality of death, so they dream up some escape. They can't deal with death so they dream up some faith in the afterlife." Well, I didn't dream up anything, and neither did Paul. But death is real, and it is certain, and why wouldn't you be interested if someone said there's another way? Jesus died on our behalf, and rose from the dead to prove the open door to eternal life—to prove the Way of Life is real and possible. Of all the great religious leaders of world history, only one has a tomb with no body in it. Jesus rose from the dead, and as Paul wrote to some others in a letter: "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14) Even though our bodies may die, we will live eternally with Jesus. As Pastor Nicky Gumbel says, "Many people see only a hopeless end, but we have an endless hope." The way of life in Jesus gives us freedom from death. Now, there's much more to that. It's not just freedom from death itself, but true freedom from all things leading up to death. In Christ, we have forgiveness of our sins. Death entered the world by sin. Sin leads to death. In Christ, we have freedom from death, forgiveness of sins, life eternal.

Freedom from death and purpose in life. Purpose in life—"as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to His own people and to the Gentiles." When I say Jesus is the Way of Life, I mean right now, not just in heaven. This is a message of light, light for all peoples. Oh, we have measured and considered a number of competing ways of life in the sermons of Peter and Paul. Practical atheism is no way of life. Nihilism is no way; self-actualization is no joy; hedonism, individualism, religiosity, pursuing false gods of our own making—friends we have tried it all! The Way of Life is Jesus. This is the message of light. Imagine your whole life endued with purpose. Imagine every experience of your life filled with meaning and illuminated by the light of Christ. Once you belong to Jesus Christ, your life has purpose. There is a call on your life that Jesus wants

you to fulfill. There is a goal and a noble end to your life, and you know that God has it all prepared for you and will bring it about, He will bring it to completion. You know “that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6) Purpose in life. Your suffering, your difficulties, your ups and your downs, they are not without meaning. They are not random occurrences scattered across the plane of existence anymore, for: “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28) We know the message of light. We find our purpose in Jesus.

Paul sees Agrippa as a perfect candidate for the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. And why shouldn't Agrippa turn, give up all the other ways he has sought satisfaction and meaning, and give his life to Jesus? In Jesus we have freedom from death and purpose in life. The Way of Life is Jesus—laying every single aspect of our being before the Lord, Jesus. What does that look like? It looks a little like Paul, standing there in chains. His life is not his own, but because it belongs to Jesus, his life is rich and bold and full of purpose and freedom. Paul can preach to poor men, prisoners, guards or kings. No shame from his past—he knows forgiveness and freedom from death. No anxiety for his future—he has purpose in Jesus Christ. Lay it all down. What does it look like to lay it all down before Jesus? Can you trust Him with the things that matter most to you?

Today, in particular, we encourage one another to make a commitment—a commitment to the Lord. We want to make a commitment in that area of our lives that can pull our hearts off course as fast as any, our financial lives. What does it look like to say, “Jesus, I’ve tried a hundred ways to make this work. I want You in charge of my finances. I have tried it my way; I want it Your way. Show me the Way of Life.” Can you trust Him in all areas of your life? Can you trust Him with your kids? “Lord, I want Your message of light to reach my kids. I want Your ways, not my ways for them.” Can You trust Him in your marriage? “I want Your ways, not my prideful claim to my side of the interchange. I want Your ways in my marriage.” Your career. Your reputation and your history. Your past, your future, your present...your very self. Lay it all down. Lay it all down today. Jesus is the Way of Life.

STUDY GUIDE

“The Way Is Jesus” • Acts 26:19-29

Start It

- The Way of Life is Jesus. Are you offended by the “scandal of particularity”? Jesus presented Himself as the only way to come home to God the Father (John 14:6). There are many things in life that take great attention to detail. There is only one way, for example, to get on the right airplane. You have to pay the exact amount, carry the right ticket, produce the right identification, walk through the right security screening and down the right terminal, be at the right gate at the right time, board the plane and sit on the right seat. We are not offended. But it is hard to accept the particularities of God’s plan of salvation. Religion is our search for God, but a relationship with Jesus is God’s rescue of us. There can be many religions, many ways to search, but if you want to be found then look to Jesus.

Study It

- Read Acts 26:19-23. Paul says “I was not disobedient.” What is the difference between doing what we want and doing what God tells us to do? Do you think this impacted Paul’s confidence in any way?
- Paul summarizes the Gospel in verse 23. Do you see the outline of the Gospel in this one sentence?
- Read Acts 26:24-29. Why does Festus oppose what Paul is saying? What is Festus’ charge against Paul? Is this a common charge against Christians today? Is Paul accused of too little knowledge of the Scriptures or too much?
- What do you imagine is happening in Agrippa’s mind and heart as he hears Paul’s testimony? The word “Christian” occurs only three times in the Bible. How do you think Agrippa is using it here?
- Paul sought to persuade Agrippa. Is it important to try to persuade others to believe in Jesus? Why is persuasion necessary? What forms of persuasion are most effective?

Pray It

Almighty God, You gave Paul such courage to tell his story, to speak Your name, and to persuade King Agrippa to consider the truth. Pour such courage into me by Your Holy Spirit, that I might carry the message of light to my loved ones and friends with even a penny-measure of boldness this week. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Live It

Ask the Lord to grant you one opportunity to use the name of Jesus in conversation with a non-believer.