

Can You Defend Your Life?

by Warren Wiersbe

Warren Wiersbe's sermon emphasizes the importance of personal testimony and the transformative discoveries made by Paul in his journey of faith.

Duration: 33:48

Scripture: Acts 9:17

Topics: "Defense"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of sharing one's personal testimony of encountering Jesus Christ. He uses the example of the apostle Paul, who passionately shared his own testimony with others. The speaker highlights four discoveries that Paul made through his encounter with Jesus, and encourages the audience to reflect on their own experiences with the Lord. The sermon concludes with an invitation for those who have not yet discovered the Lord to do so, and a challenge to view difficult situations as opportunities to glorify God.

Transcript

You have no doubt seen the poster that reads, quote, if you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Close quote. Paul was arrested, but not for being a Christian. Paul was arrested because the people in the temple thought that he had defiled the temple by bringing in Gentiles.

They supposed that he had done this. Paul is standing on the steps that lead up to the barracks that protected the temple, and he's asked for permission to speak. Now there are some men who would have been glad for an opportunity to get away from that crowd.

I suppose if I had been there, I would have said to that centurion, let's go to the safest place we can find. But Paul's life was not built on what was the safest thing, or the easiest thing, or the most comfortable thing. Paul's life was governed by one particular motive, to glorify God by winning souls.

And Paul looked upon that mob, and that's what they were, as they stood in the temple courts. And he saw there, as Jesus had seen, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They were sheep not having a shepherd.

They were religious without righteousness. They were zealous without knowledge. They were in a temple that had been forsaken.

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. When a man is in a tight spot, it brings out what really motivates his life. Someone has said that life is something like a tea bag.

You never really see what it's like until it's in hot water, and there may be some truth to that. And so Paul looked upon this situation as an opportunity to glorify God. I wonder if the last time I was in a tight spot, I looked upon it as an opportunity to glorify God.

Or was I looking for an opportunity to sneak out as fast as I could? Now, Paul does not defend his life except to defend the gospel. Paul's purpose in life was to let people know that Jesus was the Savior. The only way to be saved was through faith in Christ.

He'd come to Jerusalem to show his love for the Jewish people. Paul had been called as a minister of God to the Gentiles, but he loved his people, the Jews. In fact, he wrote to the Romans and said, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

Then in the next chapter he says, I would, God, that I myself could be condemned, that they might be saved. He had a great love for his people, Israel. And this was his opportunity now to present to them what Jesus Christ really meant to him.

Paul is not so much defending Christianity as he is presenting his life. But after all, the greatest defense of the faith is a life lived for the glory of God. I know that each one of us has neighbors, friends, loved ones who don't trust the Lord Jesus.

We say, oh, if only I could prove to them how real this is. If only I could just sit down and go with them step by step, but I can't do it. The greatest defense of the faith is not an argument.

It's a life. The greatest defense of the faith is not a debate. It's a life.

And Paul knew that they could argue theology and they could debate about the law, but they couldn't argue with his experience based on the word of God. And so when Paul says, I now make my defense, it doesn't mean that he feels he's guilty and therefore has to be defended. He's simply saying to these people whom he loved, who were so confused and so prejudiced, I want to tell you what has happened to me.

By the way, if someone were to come to you and say, tell me what's happened between you and Jesus Christ, how long would the chapter be? Now, Paul could have kept going and going and he got to that one word that blinded them. But if you and I were to stand up and tell what Jesus Christ has done for us, how long would the chapter be? And how many people would be convinced? As Paul gives his testimony, he shares with these people four very wonderful discoveries that he had made. Now, when somebody discovers something, they want to share it.

When Dr. Salk discovered his vaccine, he shared it. I pray that someday soon some research scientist will discover something to take care of cancer and he'll share it. When you discover something, you say, Eureka, I found it.

And Paul said, I've made some discoveries and I want to share these with you. Very calmly, the Apostle Paul, speaking in the Hebrew language, shares with these people four life-changing discoveries. He says, first of all, I have discovered the Lord.

That's a remarkable thing for Paul to say because he was raised a Pharisee. He was raised a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was one who was devoted to the God of Israel.

And yet, Paul says, I have discovered the Lord. You see, Paul thought he knew God. He was born in Tarsus, that great university city.

But his parents sent him to Jerusalem where he studied at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the greatest rabbis. And at the feet, literally at the feet of Gamaliel, because the rabbi sat on a raised platform and his disciples sat before him at his feet. That's the place a student ought to be.

The student is not above his teacher. And he sat at the feet of Gamaliel and he learned about the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, who called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees and promised him a son, Isaac. The God of Isaac, who gave him a bride.

The God of Jacob, who blessed him with 12 sons, who became the 12 tribes of Israel. The God of David and the God of Isaiah. And as Paul studied the Old Testament at the feet of Gamaliel, he said, I've come to know God.

But he discovered he was wrong. You see, he thought that the God of Israel was only the God of Israel, that he was the God of law and the God of judgment and the God of Jewish history only. But then on the Damascus road, he discovered the Lord.

Now, Jesus Christ, when he was on earth, had claimed to be God. Oh, I've had people say there's no place where he says that. He does say it and he accepts worship as God.

When Thomas bowed before Jesus and said, my Lord and my God, Jesus didn't scold him. He accepted it. When they sang his praises on what is called Palm Sunday, the Pharisees came to Jesus and said, tell them to be quiet.

Do you hear what they're saying? They are applying to you words that apply only to deity. Jesus said, if they were to keep quiet, the stones would sing out my praises. Now, Jesus Christ, when he was here on earth, claimed to be God and lived like God and accepted the worship and praise that belongs to God.

And this is why Saul of Tarsus hated him. You see, Saul of Tarsus thought he knew God and thought he knew Jesus. Who is God? God is the God of Israel.

Who is Jesus? The imposter, the deceiver, the troublemaker. Why? Anybody who knows theology, and Paul knew theology, knows that God is not going to wed himself to a human body. That's unthinkable.

God is Spirit. And surely God is not going to come down and die. He is the Eternal One.

And so Saul of Tarsus had all of his theology straight, but it was wrong. And he had all of his facts about Jesus of Nazareth straight, but they were wrong. And on the road to Damascus, he discovered the Lord.

He discovered that the Christ, the Jesus of Nazareth, whom he hated, was the God whom he thought he knew. My friends, there are millions of people across this world, many of them here in the city of Chicago, who think that they know God. Oh, it's the God of my fathers.

My father and my mother worship God this way. I have my religion handed down to me. Ah, but do you know Jesus Christ is your own... Well, I know about Him.

He's not what He claims to be. He's a pretender. He's a deceiver.

He's just a man like anybody else. A good teacher, high ethical standards, but no, He's not God. And I wonder if somebody here today needs to make the same discovery that Saul of Tarsus made.

He discovered the Lord. He discovered that the Eternal God of Israel was Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I have to rejoice quietly in my heart when I read verse 8. Jesus could have said from heaven, I am Jesus.

But he said, I am Jesus of Nazareth. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? The Lord Jesus took that despised name, Nazareth, and lifted it all the way up to heaven. And He spoke that name from heaven.

I am Jesus of Nazareth. And Saul of Tarsus discovered, number one, that Jesus was God. Number two, He was alive.

He had been raised from the dead. And number three, He was forgiving. Now, Jesus could have spoken from heaven and said, I am Jesus of Nazareth.

You are persecuting me, and therefore I am going to judge you. Ah, but Jesus didn't come to condemn. He came to save.

And as Saul of Tarsus was flat on his face, in the dust, blinded by the glory of God, and yet seeing the Son of God, he discovered that this Jesus had died for him, and He was a forgiving Savior. I think this is one reason why Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the Apostle, every chance he got, he mentioned what it meant to be saved. When he wrote to Timothy, he wrote these words, I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, in that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus, this is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief. 1 Timothy chapter 1, verses 12 to 15. And this crowd is standing there, listening.

And they knew Him. They had seen Him raised at the feet of Gamaliel. They knew Him as the rising young rabbi, who was profiting in the Jews' religion, and was standing head and shoulders above everybody else.

They knew Him. And He says to them, I discovered the Lord. Now, it wasn't that the God that they were worshiping was wrong.

It was that they were not worshiping the God of Israel in truth. Saul is saying here, everything I learned from Gamaliel was true, except for one thing. He didn't take it far enough.

And that led to the second discovery. In verses 1 through 10, he discovered the Lord. In verse 8, he discovered himself.

Who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. You're persecuting me. And all of a sudden, he saw himself.

You know, it's a great hour in a person's life when he sees himself. For 20 years, Jacob had been a schemer, a liar. Jacob could pull strings, and Jacob could plant seeds and cultivate the fruit of deception.

And then one night, Jesus Christ came down and wrestled with Jacob and broke him. And He said to Jacob, what is your name? Jacob said, my name is Jacob, the supplanter, the schemer. It was a great hour in that man's life when he saw himself.

Job, defending his own righteousness before God, sees God. And he said, I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear. But now mine eye seeth thee, and I repent.

I'm nothing. Isaiah came into the temple one day. He saw the Lord high and lifted up, and saw His glory filling the temple.

And he said, woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips. He saw himself. That was the beginning of life for him.

One day, Peter was mending his nets and going to go out fishing. And Jesus said, let's launch out into the deep right now. And he cast in his nets and caught a great many fish.

Peter fell at Jesus' knees and he said, depart from me. I'm a sinful man, O Lord. Have you ever come to the place where you have discovered yourself? If the Lord Jesus came to us today and said, what is your name? Would somebody have to say a liar? What is your name? Covetous, envious, critical.

What is your name? That's what happened to Saul. Saul, the great Pharisee. Saul, the great rabbi.

When he discovered Jesus Christ and discovered the Lord, he discovered himself. And everything that had been so important to him became nothing. Now, he records this experience many years later in the third chapter of Philippians.

I want to read it to you. Because I think somebody here today needs to have this same experience. Philippians chapter 3, verse 4. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh, writes Paul, if any other man thinketh that he hath reasons for which he might trust in the flesh, I more.

If anybody has credentials, I have them. Here they are. Circumcised the eighth day, that made him a child of the covenant, of the stock of Israel, pure blood, of the tribe of Benjamin that gave us the first king, Saul, and Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee.

Now, we commonly think that the Pharisees were all hypocrites. They weren't. The Pharisees, many of them, were godly people who just needed more instruction.

Concerning zeal, persecuting the church. Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. Now, here's a man who says, here are my credentials.

You want to spread out your credentials, here are mine. In my birth, in my religion, in my profession, in my blood, in everything about me, faultless. But what things were gained to me, those I counted lost for Christ? Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things.

And do count them but refuse that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God, by faith that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death. Here is an amazing thing. Somebody here at Moody Church in Chicago today may discover himself.

You may just take all of your credit cards and all of your bank books and all of your pedigree and all of your goodness, not the bad things, the good things. And you may look at them in the light of Jesus Christ and say, this is nothing but refuse. You see, the Apostle Paul did not have to give up his sinfulness to become a Christian.

Oh, he had to do that. He had to give up his righteousness to become a Christian. He discovered what Isaiah had written centuries before, all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

And he discovered himself. You know what he discovered? He discovered that his religion wouldn't save him. All of his sacrificing, all of his ceremony, all of his legal obedience, it wouldn't save him.

It kept him out of jail, but it would never get him into heaven. He discovered furthermore that what he thought was godly service was actually hurting God. I'll show you how zealous I am for my faith, he said.

I'll persecute the church. And he did. He'd come home from some of his trips and he would say, well, we got a hold of a bunch of those heretics today and we showed them.

And now he discovers to his shame that every time he laid hands on one of God's children, he laid hands on God. And Jesus said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I wonder how many people today think they are helping God and they're hurting God. I wonder how many people today are functioning in their self-righteous religion, thinking they're pleasing God and all the while everything they're living for is cheap.

That's never going to last. He discovered the Lord and when he discovered the Lord, he discovered himself. Now he discovered that everything he needed he had in Jesus Christ, not in Phariseeism, not in religion, not at sacrifice, in Jesus Christ.

I like these verses in chapter 22 of Acts, verses 14 and 15. The God of our fathers hath chosen thee. You see, everything that Saul had learned up till then was preparation for Christ.

Paul says the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. In that moment when he was blinded, he began to see and he began to realize that the law prepared the way for grace. That's why that word chosen is there.

The God of our fathers has chosen thee. He's still the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, but he's also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He says, Saul, you've been chosen.

That's grace. He didn't say, you know, we've been watching you and you have earned so many brownie points, we're going to save you now. No.

He said, Saul, you don't deserve it. If anybody in Israel least deserves to be saved, it's you. You've been out killing Christians.

But the God of your fathers has chosen you. That's grace. He's chosen you to know his will and to see the just one and to hear his voice.

For thou shalt be his witness. That's what the Lord does for you when you trust him. He discovered himself.

There are many people you talk to about this business of salvation who will readily admit, yes, Jesus Christ is God. Yes, Jesus Christ is the Savior. Yes, he's the only one who can save.

They will admit that. But when you ask them now, do you need to be saved? Well, of course not. I'm as good as anybody down at Moody Church.

I'm religious. I go to church. I say my prayers.

Ah, but have you ever seen yourself? I know myself. I'm as good as anybody else. That's the way Paul used to talk.

Pharisee of the Pharisees. Hebrew of the Hebrews. Righteousness of righteousness.

And then he saw Jesus and realized that everything that he was holding on to was cheap compared to knowing him. Have you discovered yourself? When God comes to you today and says, what's your name? Will you say sinner? He made a third discovery. I can see the congregation there in the temple getting a little bit uneasy.

They knew about Jesus of Nazareth and they'd heard about Saul's amazing conversion. He says, wait a minute, folks. I made a third discovery.

I discovered the Lord and I discovered myself and I discovered the church. While I was blind in Damascus, one of the members of the church came to me, a fellow named Ananias, who had a good reputation among the Jews, and he loved me. He could have walked in and said, you're the persecutor of the Christians.

You ought to be blind. You see, up till now, Saul had thought that the church was made up of rebels, renegades. He was trying to get them to be obedient when really, in their disobedience to law, they were being obedient to grace.

He thought that Israel was right and the church was wrong. And so he persecuted the church. Then he discovered the church.

He discovered the church was not made up of a bunch of rebels and radicals. It was made up of a group of people who had been fulfilled. Jews, Gentiles, they had come to know the Lord.

Ananias comes in and here's blind Saul sitting there. It's not an easy thing for a Pharisee to be blind. Not an easy thing for a scholar like Saul who was learned.

One day a man said, much learning doth make thee mad for him to sit there blind. But you can think when you're blind. And the word of God was teaching him and God was dealing with him.

And in came Ananias in love. And the first voice of love that Saul heard was that of Ananias. And the first word he heard was brother.

What is the word of the church? Brother. Brother Saul, the Lord who appeared to you has sent me to you. And he touched his eyes and his eyes were open and he could see.

And then they took him out and they baptized him. I hope no one goes away thinking that verse 16 teaches it's baptism that washes away your sin because it isn't. Verse 16 reads, and now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins by calling on the name of the Lord.

The verb calling is related to wash, not to baptize. Nobody ever was saved by being baptized. He called him brother.

He discovered the church. You know, many people today need to discover the church. I may be speaking to someone right now who belongs to some religious group that is not a part of God's church.

And you say, well, you're not the true people of God. You're rebels. You're heretics.

No, no. Would you let God discover us to you? The church is made up of born again people who have trusted Jesus Christ. And we want to come to you and open up our arms and say to you, brother.

We want to receive you. And strange to say, the man who had been the great persecutor of the church became the great builder of the church. And wherever Paul went, he was winning people to Christ and building the church.

He made a fourth discovery. He discovered the Gentiles. You see, up till now, Saul of Tarsus, the rabbi, had felt that the Jews were better than the Gentiles.

They were separate from the Gentiles. He wouldn't have anything to do with the Gentiles. And then God says to him, I'm going to send you to the Gentiles.

And God gave to him a tremendous compassion for lost souls. Now, the nation of Israel had not been true to the Gentiles. It's true God had put a wall between them, but he knocked that wall down when Jesus died on the cross.

It's true he put a difference between Jew and Gentile in the Old Testament. But now he says there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And Saul of Tarsus discovered that when he became Paul the apostle, that the Gentiles were as much a part of God's plan as were the Jews.

And of course, this is what infuriated that mob. Their attitude was that they were different from, better than the Gentiles. I think sometimes the attitude of the Jews toward the Gentiles is a little bit of an illustration of the attitude of some Christians toward the outsiders.

Gentile dogs. You keep your distance. We know God.

We are in fellowship with God. You keep your distance. And Paul discovered the Gentiles.

Paul discovered that God had put Israel on the earth to reach out and win the Gentiles. They had failed. Now God had put the church on this earth to reach out and win everybody.

Thou shalt be his witness to all men. Not just Jews, all men. And he got to that one word in verse 21, the word Gentiles.

I will send thee far hence to the Gentiles. And when they heard that word Gentiles, that's all they needed. What word is it that turns you on? There are some people, you mentioned the word missions, and immediately they lose their insulin.

Mention the word giving or tithing or praying or being saved. What word is it that you don't want anybody to say? That word may represent the greatest need you have in your life. And the greatest need this mob had was to realize that God was through with their temple.

God was through with their sacrifices. God was through with an exclusive nation. He was now building a church.

Of Jews and Gentiles. The thing that killed the nation of Israel was exclusiveness. We are the people of God.

The thing that will kill the church today is being exclusive. We are in and you're out. Instead of reaching out the way we ought to.

Paul discovered the Gentiles and he became the apostle to the Gentiles. And that cost him his life. You see, Paul didn't have to use that word Gentiles.

He could have said, I was called to be sent across the sea. But he deliberately used the word Gentiles. And when he was arrested, he said, I am the prisoner of the Lord for the Gentiles.

That's what put him in jail. And the mob got furious. And so they rescued Paul and took him into the barracks.

And now we're going to see him going from trial to trial, from experience to experience until God takes him to Rome. Now, where does this leave us today? It leaves us right here. How many of these discoveries have you made? Have you discovered the Lord? Was there a time in your life when you said, Who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus, the Savior.

What wilt thou have me to do? Have you discovered the Lord? Now, if you haven't, today you can. Here at the Moody Church, we close every service by singing a hymn. A hymn of invitation to invite people to come and meet the Lord.

Have you discovered yourself? Is someone sitting here today in the armor of self-righteousness? And my sword thrusts have not gotten too far into your heart. You say you'll never get me. Oh, Paul said that and God got him.

Have you discovered yourself? I think somebody here today is saying, Pastor, I have discovered myself. And what I've discovered doesn't make me happy. I know I need Jesus.

Well, He's here. He can save you. Have you discovered the church? You say, No, I don't think I have.

Why? It's the greatest fellowship in all the world. Oh, you say, I'm saved. Isn't that enough? Saved and then get into a fellowship and go to work for God.

That's what they did in the New Testament. That's what Paul did. Have you discovered the church? Have you discovered the outsiders, the Gentiles, the unsaved? Does it anger you a little bit when somebody talks about witnessing and winning souls? Maybe some spiritual work needs to be done.

Perhaps you and I need to make some discoveries today. And having made these discoveries, let's do what Saul of Tarsus did. Let's fall on our face before God and say from our hearts, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And then let's do it.

Father, we pray that this will be a time of obedience to your word. That those who need to trust Christ as their Savior will trust him. That those who need to come into fellowship with the church will do so.

That those, Father, who need to get concerned about witnessing will do so. Oh, God, work in our hearts to do the thing you want us to do. May this truly be a time of discovery and a time of victory.

For Jesus' sake we pray, amen.

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