

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
November 4, 2012

Paul Before King Agrippa

Read Acts 26:19-32

Key verse: “But Paul replied, ‘I’m not mad, most honorable Festus! I’m speaking what is sound and true’”(Acts 26:5).

When they hear the word Titanic, many Americans think of the 1997 movie by that name—a romantic tragedy based on the sinking of the ship Titanic in 1912. But Christian history tells another story, the story of a Chicago pastor named John Harper.

John was traveling on the Titanic with his six-year-old daughter when the ship struck an iceberg. Survivor reports state that John got his daughter on a lifeboat but made no effort to board one himself. Instead, John reportedly ran through the ship yelling, “Women, children, and unsaved into the lifeboats!” And John began witnessing to anyone who would listen, telling them how to have eternal life through faith in Christ.

After giving his life jacket to another man, John jumped into the ocean. He was last seen in the icy waters, clinging to a piece of wreckage. His final moments were described by a man who survived the Titanic:

“I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought Mr. John Harper, also on a piece of wreck, near me. ‘Man,’ he said, ‘Are you saved?’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘I am not.’ He replied, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’

“The waves bore him away, but, strange to say, brought him back a little later, and he said, ‘Are you saved now?’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘I cannot honestly say that I am.’ He said again, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,’ and shortly after, he went down. There, alone in the night, and with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper’s last convert.”

John Harper’s single-minded concern for the lost is reminiscent of the Apostle Paul in the Book of Acts. In the face of mob violence, imprisonment, and death, Paul used every opportunity to witness for Jesus: (1) before a mob seeking his death (Acts 21:26–22:24); (2) under arrest before Felix, the governor (Acts 24:10-16); and (3) under arrest before another governor, Festus, and King Agrippa (Acts 25:13–26:32). Paul used every opportunity to share Jesus with lost people.

While proclaiming Christ before Agrippa and Festus, Paul also witnessed to the watching crowd: “Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Are you trying to convince me that, in such a short time, you’ve made me a Christian?’ Paul responded, ‘Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today will become like me, except for these chains’” (Acts 26:28-29). Paul was more concerned about the salvation of strangers than about his own arrest and imprisonment!

Here is perhaps the single greatest reason for Paul’s powerful influence on the world: No matter the opposition or the difficulty, Paul stayed focused on God’s calling to help reach a lost and dying world with the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Under arrest before Governor Festus and King Agrippa, Paul shared his calling: “...as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests [to persecute Christians], at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

“So I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness....that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me’” (Acts 26:12-16a, 17b).

After sharing about his calling, Paul then told the governor and the king: “I wasn’t disobedient to that heavenly vision. Instead, I proclaimed first to those in Damascus and Jerusalem, then to the whole region of Judea and to the Gentiles....” (Acts 26:19).

Not every Christian has a “Damascus road” experience. Not every Christian is called to be an apostle, a missionary, or a pastor. But every Christian is called to be a witness. May God help us to be concerned about lost people, and may God help us take every opportunity to share Christ and the salvation to be found in Him!

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