

# Kingdom Conversations

Acts 26:12-29

## Introduction

We've been considering the Gospel Age of Hope in which we live, how the kingdom of God is here and growing. Perhaps most exciting to Christians who love God is the fact that just as the kingdom grows deep in us as we mature, so it grows wide through us as we witness in our culture. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for the apostles and all who would believe through them: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18). Today we'll look at Paul's testimony before Agrippa and Festus where he both preaches the gospel and relates the *way* that Jesus instructed him to do so, first by opening eyes, and second, by turning from darkness to light and the power of Satan to God.

## Opening Eyes

Many Christians share the gospel in a static way like a bumper sticker is taped to their foreheads. "Jesus is Lord." But Jesus gives Paul a much more nuanced approach, one that actually works: "...to *open their eyes*, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God..." (v18). People with closed eyes don't want light; in fact, it is at least vaguely annoying. Opening eyes can be done with the verbal news of Jesus Christ, but it is more often done through generosity, friendship, faithfulness, and (sometimes bizarre) personal testimony. All of these methods open eyes by causing people to see the effect of the gospel. Once they see this, open eyes want the light.

**Generosity:** In a different context, Jesus said the eye is the lamp of our body (Lk. 11:34), and idiomatically a light or bright eye indicated a generous person like a tight fist indicates a selfish one in our day. Teaching about the impossibility of serving God and money, Jesus says "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings" (Lk. 16:9). We should use money to win people, not people to get money. Obviously this can be abused, but generosity imitates God.

**Friendship & Faithfulness:** Paul gave himself personally during his ministry (1 Thess. 2:8), and worked his job faithfully (Acts 20:34-35). Friendship and vocation are natural environments for opening eyes, but selfish or incompetent people often disqualify their witness.

**Personal Testimony:** Jesus surprises the woman of Sychar by asking for a drink, and then he bewilders her by saying he is the one with living water (Jn. 4:9-10). Christians who tell others what has happened to them are not so much winning people to Jesus (at this point), but rather to themselves.

## Turning from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Satan to God

The light is the good news, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf. The gospel is not "asking Jesus into my heart" or, more biblically, "calling on the name of the Lord" (Rom. 10:13). These are *responses* to the gospel. Open eyes want light but are not necessarily ready to turn from darkness. After asking for water, the woman of Samaria wanted desperately to change the subject when Jesus confronted her immorality (Jn. 4:17-20). But when he told her about himself, she believed (4:26, 29, 39). These things happen at different speeds and people are in different stages according to the sovereignty of God. We are called to be generous, hard-working, merciful, caring about others, candid about and confident in the grace of God. He has made us ambassadors of his kingdom.

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