

# The Autobiography of Greatness

by Warren Wiersbe

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*Warren Wiersbe's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of seeing the light of Christ, hearing His voice, and the importance of obedience in the Christian life.*

**Duration:** 34:54

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:3, Acts 9:3

**Topics:** "Personal Testimony", "Evangelism"

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## Description

In this sermon, Paul stands before Agrippa and his wife, as well as the governor, and shares his testimony of what Jesus Christ has done for him. He emphasizes that his witness is not a defense of himself, but rather a defense of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul recounts how he saw a light and heard a voice on the Damascus road, and how he was obedient to the heavenly vision. He emphasizes that he has continued in his calling to witness to both small and great, and encourages others to do the same.

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## Transcript

We read the word of God from Acts chapter 26, where Paul is standing before Agrippa and Festus and Bernice, and he's giving his testimony. Acts chapter 26. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself.

Then Paul stretched forth a hand and answered for himself, I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, concerning all the things of which I am accused of the Jews, 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. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, who knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

And now I stand and am a judge for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers, unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead? I verily thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, 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. And I punished them often in every synagogue, and

compelled them to blaspheme.

And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 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 who journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. But rise and stand upon thy feet. For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of the things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the borders of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works fit for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue unto this day witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and unto the Gentiles.

And may that light dawn upon some heart here today. I appeal to Caesar. When Paul spoke those words, he created a problem for the governor.

Any Roman citizen could appeal to Caesar's court, and instantly that took him out of the governor's jurisdiction. I appeal to Caesar. But Festus had a problem.

He had a prisoner but no charges. He had a man who for two years had been imprisoned in Caesarea, but no one knew what he had done. And legally for the governor to send a prisoner to Caesar without some kind of legal papers, it simply was impossible for him to do it.

What should he do? Well, King Agrippa showed up about that time with his wife, and King Agrippa was expert in matters that related to the Jews. And so the governor thought I'll have Paul give his account to King Agrippa, and surely King Agrippa can find something that I can write to Caesar. So Paul was brought in, and there he stands, and there's the governor, there's the king, here's this little man chained.

I would have you to know that the real king on that occasion was Paul, and the real prisoners were Agrippa and his wife and the governor. Now what did Paul do? Paul did not argue theology. Paul did not debate some fine point of religion.

Paul just simply stood there and told them what Jesus Christ had done for him. That's all. Paul's witness was not a defense of himself so much as a defense of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, to put it in one simple sentence, Paul just simply gave his testimony. And in this testimony, Paul explains what the Christian life is all about. And there sit these people who are high in authority but deficient in spirituality.

Here sit these people who have all kinds of riches and yet they're so poor. Here are people with all pomp and circumstance and earthly glory and yet they have no hope of heaven. And Paul just stands there and says, this is what it means to be a Christian.

Now Paul makes four statements in his testimony that I'd like us to underscore, because these four statements summarize for us what it means to be a Christian. Statement number one is in verse 13, I saw a light. Now you know the story.

It's a dramatic one. It's given three times in the book of Acts. Armed with the authority of the high priest, Saul of Tarsus, like a raging animal, is on his way to Damascus at the time of day when most people are resting, midday, he is on his way to persecute.

And lo and behold, as he's moving along the Damascus road, I saw a light. Now the interesting thing is this, up till now, Saul thought he was in the light. If you had stopped him 20 minutes before this experience and said, are you an enlightened person? He would have laughed and said, of course I'm an enlightened person.

After all, I'm not a Gentile, I'm a Jew. Did not God shed his light down upon the Jews? Yes he did. After all, I am not just an ordinary Jew, I'm a Pharisee.

Do I not have the custodial care of the law? I have the light of Almighty God upon my life. I have the law. I have the traditions of the elders.

Of course I'm not walking in darkness, I'm walking in light. And then he says, I saw a light and I discovered that all this time I had been in the darkness. Isn't that a tragedy? There may be somebody here today who says, Pastor Wiersbe, I'm in the light, I'm not like other people.

I have culture and I have religion and I have tradition. I'm in the light. Ah, you may discover before this meeting ends that you're in the darkness.

Paul discovered he was in the darkness about the law. He thought that the way a person is supposed to be saved is by keeping the law and he rigidly kept the law. And then the light dawned upon him and he saw a light and realized that the purpose of the law was to bring him to Christ.

He was in the darkness about himself. When Paul looked into the mirror, he felt rather smugly at peace with himself. In this respect, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Touching the law, he was blameless as he measured himself by the traditions of the elders. He passed with flying colors.

And then he says, I saw a light and I realized I'd been in the darkness about the law and I'd been in the darkness about myself. Here I thought I was Saul of Tarsus, the great student of Gamaliel, the one who was so efficient spiritually. And then I saw a light and I realized that all of my righteousnesses were as filthy rags.

That was quite a startling discovery for this proud Pharisee. He discovered he was in the darkness about Jesus Christ. He was out persecuting Christians because they were wrong.

And then he saw a light and discovered that they were right. He'd been telling everyone, Jesus is dead. This carpenter from Nazareth is dead.

They stole his body. Ah, but then he saw a light and he realized that Jesus was alive and Paul was dead. That's where the Christian life begins, my friend.

You've got to see the light. Paul had written in one of his letters to the Corinthian church, if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the knowledge of the glory of God should shine unto them.

You see, the day came, the hour came when Paul saw the light. I saw a light. And when he saw that light, a tremendous change took place.

Now this change is given to us in verse 18 of Acts chapter 26, to open their eyes. Now Paul's eyes were closed physically. He was blinded by the light and they had to lead him around for three days.

Paul was blinded that he might be able to see. But what did God do for Paul when he saw the light? Well, to turn them from darkness to light. In the Bible, darkness is a picture of sin.

Darkness is a picture of death. To turn them from darkness to light. Has that ever happened to you? From the power of Satan unto God.

Wasn't it amazing for Paul to discover that all that he was doing was not being done in the power of God? It was being done in the power of Satan. Do you mean a person can be religious and be under the power of Satan? That's what Paul wrote. Satan has blinded the minds of those that don't believe the Gospel.

We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. Ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That's what happened to Paul. Here he was stumbling along like a mean animal in the darkness of sin, thinking he's doing God a service, and then I saw a light, and I saw Jesus Christ. And Paul said, what happened back in Genesis chapter 1 happened to me.

The light came out of the darkness back in Genesis chapter 1, and with that light there came life, and there came liberty, and there came beauty, and there came order, and that's what happened to me. Up till then I was in darkness and bondage. I saw a light to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.

Paul, do you mean to tell me that in your religion you had no forgiveness of sins? No. Do you mean to tell me that with all of your legalism, your rules, your rituals, your temple, you had no forgiveness of sin? No. I found that when I saw the light and met Jesus Christ.

What a transformation, from darkness to light, from death to life, from the power of Satan to God, from guilt to forgiveness, from poverty to an inheritance among them that are sanctified. Oh, Paul was rich that day. Rich in culture, rich in religion, rich in self-righteousness, rich in position.

He was profiting more than anybody else in his religious deeds. And then he saw a light, and he realized he was bankrupt. Now the two little words at the end of verse 18 tell us how all this happened, by faith.

I saw a light, and in that light I saw Jesus Christ, and I trusted him. The second phrase that summarizes what it means to be a Christian is found in verse 14. First, I saw a light.

Second, I heard a voice. God spoke to him. Now, Paul had thought that Jesus was dead.

He'll never speak again. I don't know that perhaps Paul had heard, when he was Saul of Tarsus, he had heard Jesus speak personally. We don't know.

But he was sure he would never speak again. They nailed him to a cross, and on that cross he said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. And down at the bottom of the cross, people were saying, he saved others, he cannot save himself.

Let him come down from the cross, if he be the Christ of God. And then Jesus said, it is finished. Into thy hands I commend my spirit.

And at that very moment, invisible hands reached down and got a hold of the veil of the temple, and tore the veil in two. God was breaking down the wall of separation between sinners and God. I heard a voice.

And that voice said to me, Saul, Saul, he knew his name. Ever go through the Bible and find the times when God speaks to people? Abraham, Abraham, Samuel, Samuel, Saul, Saul. Of course, when you hear the word Saul, you think immediately of that Old Testament king.

He was of the tribe of Benjamin, and so was the first king of the nation of Israel, Saul of Benjamin. And he was a rebel, and he was disobedient, and he tried to cover his rebellion and his disobedience with religion. He was well-named, because here is Saul of Tarsus, with all of his sincerity and all of his devotion, who was a rebel.

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? He discovered that not only was Jesus alive, but he was discovering that Saul of Tarsus was laying hands on God. Back in the Old Testament, they were carrying the ark back to Jerusalem, and the ark began to totter a little bit, because they were carrying it the wrong way. And a man reached out and just touched the ark to steady it, and he died.

You see, when he heard that voice, Saul discovered how patient and gracious and loving Jesus had been. Somebody listening to me right now, you have been persecuting Jesus Christ. Oh, but you say, how would I do that by laying hands on God's children? Every time Saul of Tarsus laid hands on one of God's children, he laid hands on Jesus Christ.

And Jesus said an interesting thing. He said, Saul, you think you're a great rabbi. I look upon you as a stubborn animal.

It's hard for you to kick against the goads. Now, they had two kinds of goads. One was a long stick with a steel point on it, and they would prod the animal.

When the oxen or the other animals were hesitant to work and they were being stubborn, they were goaded. If they tried to kick, the animals discovered that at the front of the wagon, oftentimes, they had placed spikes. And so when they kicked, they only hurt themselves.

God's point of view is interesting. Here comes the great leading rabbi. God said, I'm sorry.

In my sight, he's nothing but a stubborn, raging animal. What were the goads that were prodding Paul? Day and night, something kept prodding him. What were they? I want to suggest several of them to you.

The failure of Judaism. The failure of Judaism. This young rabbi had studied the Old Testament law and the prophets, but something was missing.

It was empty. He had adopted the strictest rules of the Pharisees, but something was missing. Another goad.

Deep inside, Saul knew he was a failure. Oh, he put up a beautiful front, but he'd close his eyes at night and he'd see the faces of those Christians who were being arrested, persecuted, and killed. And their faces were different.

And their voices were different. And their words were different. And he saw the face of Stephen like the face of an angel.

Moses had had a glowing face, but not like Stephen. And God was saying to Saul, the glory of the Old Covenant is fading away. There's a new glory that's come through my Son, Jesus Christ.

And these goads kept prodding him. His religion had failed. His own self-righteousness had failed.

The Christians were living godly lives. Stephen had died praying for his murderers. Paul knew he couldn't do that.

I wonder what kind of goads the Lord is using to prod you, my friend. You've been resisting God. You've been rebelling against God.

I heard a voice. That voice revealed to him that he was a sinner. But that voice also revealed that Jesus was the Savior.

You see, Jesus could have said, Saul, Saul, I'm through with you. Saul, Saul, you are a dead man. But in grace and in love and in patience and mercy, the Son of God spoke from heaven and said, Saul, Saul, you're persecuting me.

Aren't you tired of kicking against the goads? And Saul was tired. Who art thou, Lord? I'm Jesus. What wilt thou have me to do? I saw a light.

I heard a voice. God still speaks to people. It's interesting that Paul says he spoke to me in the Hebrew language.

God talks to you in language you can understand. If God's been talking to you, my friend, listen. He makes a third statement.

Verse 19. I saw a light. I heard a voice.

I was not disobedient. Ah, do you know why many people are not saved today? Because they're disobedient. Oh, you say, I thought people got saved by believing.

That's right. But believing is an act of obedience. We're not saved by good works.

We're saved by trusting Jesus Christ. But may I remind you that the Word of God says God commands men everywhere to repent. God doesn't suggest it.

God doesn't hint at it. God commands it. God commands you to repent.

He commands you to repent for your own good. The invitation of Jesus Christ to a lost world is not only a gracious invitation, it is a firm commandment. Jesus said, come unto Me.

An invitation, a commandment. May I say to you today that if you have repeatedly rejected Christ as your Savior, you are a rebel. If you have been seeing the light and hearing the voice and God has been prodding you and speaking to you and you continue to say no, you are a rebel.

Do we have the idea that the invitation to trust Jesus Christ is a weak, sissy, backbone-less kind of a thing? Does our Lord stand there in pity and in weakness? Not on your life. The One who says to you, come unto Me and I'll give you rest, is the King of glory. When the Word of God says God commands men everywhere to repent, God means this.

Paul says, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Instantly Paul obeyed. He found out what he was.

He found out who Jesus was. He found out what he needed to do. He did it.

He obeyed. They took him by the hands. Can you imagine the contrast? This rough, stern, persecuting religious leader, blinded, taken by the hand and led away.

He's meek now. Ah, but he has obeyed God. And Paul is stronger in his weakness than he ever was in his strength.

Now it cost something for Paul to obey. When Paul says, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient, that cost him something. They tried to kill him.

I doubt that anybody listening to me today would have his life threatened if he trusted Christ. But there are some of you who resist and reject the Lord Jesus Christ for a lot less reasons. Paul could have said, but think of my reputation.

And God would have said, your reputation without salvation is nothing. What will my friends and my family say? What will God say? I don't know what excuse you're using today to reject the Lord Jesus Christ, but I say unto you, if you've seen the light and if you've heard the voice, the next statement is, I was not disobedient. For some are disobedient in rejecting the Savior.

I won't go into the details of all it cost Paul to be obedient. I thank God that he was obedient. We wouldn't be here today if he were not.

He obeyed the Lord in spite of storm, in spite of suffering, in spite of shipwreck, in spite of prison, in spite of persecution. The very things he did to others were done to him. He just kept right on going.

Which leads us to the fourth statement. I saw a light. I heard a voice.

I was not disobedient. Verse 22, I continue unto this day. I haven't gone on a detour.

What God called me to do, I'm still doing. I was not disobedient to that heavenly vision. I continue unto this day.

Doing what? Witnessing. Witnessing to small and great. There are many people who make great beginnings, but they have very poor endings.

There are many people who have great magnificent starts and very poor finishes. Paul wasn't like that. Paul said, I started, I saw the light, I heard the voice, I was not disobedient, and I have continued unto this day.

Is that true of us? Oh, I have met Christians who had great beginnings, but you can't find them today. Somewhere along the line, somebody sneered at them and they've quit. Somebody at the church didn't talk to them and so they've left.

I have continued unto this day. And if you want to see what it's cost me, here are the scars. Paul writes to the Galatian churches from henceforth, let no man trouble me.

I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus. Not many of us bear on our bodies the brands of the Lord Jesus. Paul did.

I have continued unto this day. Continued in what, Paul? I've continued witnessing. You remember when you were first saved? What a thrill it was.

You had to tell everybody about it. It was just so easy and so natural and so joyful just to share Christ. Not anymore.

We've been rebuffed a few times. We've been laughed at a few times. And so now we witness.

We belong to God's secret service and we witness in quiet little ways. Paul said, I continue witnessing. I continue with the Word of God, saying only those things which the law of Moses and the prophets have said.

I'm still with the Bible. Remember when you first got saved, how the Word of God was just so precious to you? You came to Sunday school and you came to the morning service and the evening service, even came to the midweek service. All the Word of God was so wonderful and you continued in the Word of God.

But not anymore. Lots of things to do early on Sunday morning. We can't make it for Sunday school.

Sunday evening, it's not too easy. And Wednesday evening is really out. And so we really can't say I continue unto this day.

Paul continued witnessing and Paul continued in the Word of God and Paul continued sharing the gospel of Christ wherever Paul went. He was telling people Christ died for their sins, according to the scriptures. And he was buried.

He arose again the third day and he was seen by witnesses. And I've seen him and I saw a light and I heard a voice and I was not disobedient. And I've continued to this day.

How was Paul able to keep going? I speak to some people now who have quit. I'm through with the Christian life. I'm sorry.

I just can't make it. Paul tells us how to do it. Having therefore obtained help from God.

Paul didn't do it in his own strength. Paul was not depending upon his own wisdom. Paul said I had to get help from God and you do and I do.

Oh, you say it's so hard to witness for Christ. Get your help from God. It's so difficult to fight temptation.

Get your help from God. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. This, my friends, is what it means to be a Christian.

I saw a light. I heard a voice. I was not disobedient.

I've continued to this day. Now, I would say that most of us here today have seen that light. You know that Jesus is the Savior.

You've heard the voice. God has spoken to your heart from the word. What about that third statement? Have you been obedient? Have I been obedient? Let me say a word in love to the dear unsaved friends who are with us today and at every service we have them.

My friend, don't be disobedient. Obey what the Lord is saying to you. I'll tell you why.

He's goading you. He's prodding you. He's doing it in love and you're only hurting yourself.

That's right. And so when the invitation is given, don't be disobedient. Come and give your heart to Christ.

Let me say a word to Christian people who say, well, pastor, I've seen that light and I've heard that voice and I obeyed his call. Are we still obeying? Or have we found convenient excuses not to obey? Let me say a word to some who used to obey, but you've fallen by the wayside. You can't say I've continued until this day.

Get back on the road. Come back to walk with the Lord. This, my friend, is a perfect description of what it means to be a Christian.

I saw a light. I heard a voice. I was not disobedient and I continue unto this day.

Has that been your experience? Now, if it's not been your experience, it can be your experience. If you'll just obey him today, surrender yourself to him. Let him save you.

Let's pray together. We come, our Father, thankful for the reality of conversion. Thankful that a person can receive Jesus Christ and be translated out of darkness into light.

I pray for those here today, O God, who have been disobedient to your word and have not trusted your Son. Help them to surrender and believe and be saved. Help us who are believers honestly to be able to say, I have continued unto this day.

Lord, help us to be continuous Christians. Help us, Heavenly Father, to continue in the word and in witnessing and in our walk. We pray that the Holy Spirit of God will apply this word to our hearts now.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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