

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #49

Acts 22:1-30

People love to hear testimonies of other people. In fact, in many instances people will turn out in droves to hear someone give a testimony, but not turn out to hear God's Word expounded. One of the biggest mistakes made by many churches is to put someone who just came to faith up in front of people to give their testimony. Kent Hughes tells a story of a time when a famous musician supposedly trusted Jesus Christ and many churches wanted to schedule him to tell his story. Some churches grouped together expecting that there would be about 10,000 people who would attend to listen to this famous entertainer tell how he came to faith in Jesus Christ. Well he sang a couple of his songs and then walked off stage and started cursing "with profanity that faded wallpaper and wilted flowers" (*Acts*, p. 297). This man had no proven track record of a life committed to God; he did not know the Word of God and he obviously was not interested in doing the will of God. Yet here he was in front of people to testify of his experience.

The Apostle Paul came to faith in Jesus Christ in Acts 9 and the year was somewhere around 35 A.D. Now, more than twenty years later, after having an incredible life and ministry to the glory of God, he gives his personal testimony. Now what is very important to see is that when Paul gave his testimony, he had been serving the Lord for twenty to thirty years. He was not some new novice Christian standing up to give his testimony; he was a mature believer with a life that backed up the story. He had integrity in that Jesus Christ had really changed his life.

This is the first of four times Paul actually gave his own testimony in the latter stages of his life: He gives it here in Acts 22 in a Jewish context; he gives it in Acts 26 in a Jewish/ Gentile context; he gives a partial testimony in Philippians 3 in a church context and he gives a partial testimony in I Timothy 1 in a pastoral context. When Paul asked to speak to the Jews (Acts 21:39) he is addressing people who are so upset they want to kill him, but he begins by calling them "brothers and fathers."

In verse 1, Paul calls this message a defense (*απολογία*) or literally his apologetic. Paul is giving this to defend his ministry and message. Think of the pressure on Paul as he delivers this. He is standing before people who literally want him dead. In order to try to refute these allegations he begins addressing the crowd in the Hebrew dialect, which was Aramaic, which, according to **verse 2**, when the people heard him speaking they began to quiet down.

PAUL TELLS THE FACTUAL TRUTH ABOUT HIS CONVERSION AND MINISTRY AND WHEN HE WAS DONE THE PEOPLE STILL WANTED TO KILL HIM.

Now usually there is tremendous power in a personal testimony. Most people love to hear some dramatic story about how one came to faith in Christ. Truth is you would be hard pressed to find more of a dramatic testimony in all of history than that of the Apostle Paul.

Let us not forget that Luke is writing this book of Acts for Theophilus to tell him how the Church began. Paul is a critical factor in the history of the Church and Grace Age. Luke wanted Theophilus to know that even though Paul's conversion was dramatic and his life change was dramatic, many people hated him.

Here is a critical lesson for us to learn. Our job is to tell the truth, but sometimes it won't faze anyone. They won't like us and they won't like our message. They will not change their minds and they will not concede truth. Now the chapter breaks down into three sections:

SECTION #1 – Paul speaks to the Jews and they react. **22:1-23**

Now Paul could have said all of you people are nuts. You are out of your minds. But he calmly decides to tell the story of what happened to him. There are two main parts to this:

Part #1 - The apologetic presentation of Paul to the Jews. **22:1-21**

There were two apologetic messages Paul presents:

(Apologetic Message #1) - Paul reminds the Jews of his previous life. **22:1-5**

He brings out five facts which are absolutely true and provable:

Fact #1 - Paul was a Jew. **22:3a**

Paul basically says I am not against the Jewish people, I am Jewish.

Fact #2 - Paul was born in Tarsus but was brought up in Jerusalem. **22:3b**

Paul says I am not against this city; in fact I was actually brought up here in Jerusalem.

Fact #3 - Paul was educated by Gamaliel. **22:3c**

The mention of Gamaliel's name meant much to this Jewish crowd. He was a calm, well respected Jewish leader (Acts 5:34). Gamaliel was the best Jewish teacher in Jerusalem. In fact, he came to be known as "Rabban Gamaliel." There were three classifications of Jewish teachers: 1) Rab—speaks of a great person; 2) Rabbi—speaks of a great teacher; 3) Rabban—speaks of the highest level of teacher. Gamaliel was one of only seven Jewish teachers called Rabban. He was known for his strict adherence to the Law. In fact, you could legitimately say that Gamaliel was a doctor of law. The education he offered was in strict conformity to the O.T. Law. Any who were connected to Gamaliel had a great zeal for God and the Law. Paul says I was trained at his feet. He had the best Jewish education one could have. In fact, he says I was as zealous for the Law as any of you.

Fact #4 - Paul persecuted those who believed in Jesus Christ. **22:4**

These people were called “the way” because they taught that faith in Jesus Christ was the only way to be right with God. Jesus, Himself, taught this (John 14:6).

Christianity says Jesus Christ is not “a way” to God; He is “the one and only way to God.” Paul had Christians arrested, both men and women, and he was responsible for their deaths.

Fact #5 - Paul was fully known and fully supported by the high priest and Jewish leaders. **22:5**

Some speculate that the high priest could have been standing right there as Paul said this. Paul says these leaders can testify of exactly what I am telling you. These leaders actually knew Paul and gave him legal letters that sanctioned Paul tracking Christians down to arrest them. They knew who Paul was and they were behind what he was doing.

This data tells us that one can be very religious and have great zeal and lack real knowledge of the grace of God and lack a relationship with Jesus Christ. One can be an avid churchgoer and very religious and very lost. That was the story of Paul.

(Apologetic Message #2) - Paul informs them of the conversion that changed him. **22:6-21**

Paul now carefully describes his encounter with Jesus Christ. This was the encounter that changed his life and theology. **This encounter changed Paul from being a law promoter to a grace promoter; from being a persecutor of Christ to being a preacher for Christ.**

There are **8 facts** that Paul states about his conversion and all facts were provable because there were eyewitnesses to each of them. His testimony carefully follows the account in chapter 9:

Fact #1 - A bright light shined all around Paul on the road to Damascus. **22:6**

Paul had not planned this or orchestrated this. He never intended to change his life to believe in Jesus Christ.

Fact #2 - Paul fell to the ground and heard a voice that asked him why he was persecuting Me. **22:7**

Why would one be angry with grace? Why would one be against Jesus Christ who died on a cross to save sinners and rose again to prove He could save sinners?

Fact #3 - Paul asked who the voice was and He said He was Jesus. **22:8**

Jesus did not leave any room for doubt as to who He was. Jesus was not a dead corpse, but He was alive and He was talking to Paul.

Fact #4 - Those with Paul saw the light but did not understand the words. **22:9**

There were eye witnesses to this. But why could Paul understand and the rest could not? The answer is in **verse 10**—Paul had been chosen, elected and appointed by God and the others weren't.

Fact #5 - Paul asked what he should do and was told to get up and go to Damascus. **22:10**

Paul at this point thought there was something he had to do and he was informed that in Damascus he would be told of all that was appointed by God for him to do.

Fact #6 - Paul was led by the hand into Damascus because he could not see. **22:11**

Paul could not see because of “the brightness of that light” that literally in Greek reads because “of the glory of the light, that specific light.” In other words, this light was the glory of God that shined on Paul. There were others involved in this story who could corroborate the factuality of it.

Fact #7 - A respected, law-keeping, devout Jew named Ananias came to Paul. **22:12-16**

Apparently these people knew who Ananias was. He was a highly respected Jew in Damascus and he was well known. He went to Paul and gave him four messages:

Message #1 - He told Paul to receive his sight, which Paul did. **22:13**

God used a well-respected Jew to help restore Paul's eyesight.

Message #2 - He told Paul God had appointed him to know God's will, see His righteous Son and hear an utterance from His mouth. **22:14**

The word “appoint” stresses God, in and of Himself, chose and determined that this is what He would sovereignly do with Paul (Smith, p. 391). Paul was chosen by God. Ananias uses the Messianic title for Christ, “the righteous One.”

Message #3 - He told Paul that he would be a witness for God to all men. **22:15**

Message #4 - He told Paul that he should arise, call on the name of Jesus to have sins forgiven and be baptized. **22:16**

Here is a text that has been butchered by churches that actually place more emphasis on water baptism than they do faith in Jesus Christ. However, if you read this passage in the original Greek text, all doctrinal confusion is solved.

If you look at the Greek text you will discover that the word “calling” is a participle. Now it is an adverbial participle of means.

So the means by which sins are washed away is by calling upon the name of the Lord. Paul would write to the Romans that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:13).

There are two possibilities concerning Paul's baptism: 1) It was an indicator that he had believed on Jesus Christ and was saved; 2) As a Jew who had rejected John's baptism which demanded that Jews admit they were sinful by baptism. This baptism was a washing baptism or cleansing baptism which basically said I admit I need a cleansing from my sin.

In either case it is the calling upon the Lord that saves and not water baptism.

Fact #8 - Paul tells them how he fell into a trance while praying in the Temple in Jerusalem. **22:17-21**

If Paul despised the Temple as they alleged (Acts 21:28), why would he go there to pray? Paul describes something that happened to him sometime later after his conversion when he was in Jerusalem. Jesus Christ actually revealed two truths to Paul:

(Revelatory Truth #1) - Jesus Christ told Paul to get out of Jerusalem because he would not be accepted there, which point he argued. **22:18-20**

Paul felt that everyone knew that he had been against Christianity and was partly responsible for killing Stephen. Paul assumed that because people knew this, they would accept his dramatic testimony. He apparently wanted to stay and visit the synagogues, but Jesus Christ said no.

Sometimes you can get beat up in the city that knows about the dramatic change in your life.

(Revelatory Truth #2) - Paul was told that he was going to be sent far away to the Gentiles. **22:21**

It is more than just a coincidence that the Greek word "send you far away" contains the word "apostle" (ἐξαποστειλω). God revealed to Paul that He was making him an apostle to the Gentiles. The reason why he had taken the grace message to the Gentile world was because he had been ordered by Jesus Christ to do that. He was obedient to the Word and will of God.

Part #2 - The Jews respond to Paul's testimony. **22:22-23**

The reaction here shows us unbelief is not rational. The Jews listened to Paul tell this story and you can be sure they did not say "my, what a wonderful story of God's grace." They said kill him. They were not interested in truth. They were not interested in grace, they wanted law. They were not interested in Jesus Christ or the Word of God. They were crying out and throwing off their coats and tossing dust into the air. This was a frenzied crowd of religious zealots who wanted to remove Paul from the earth. As one commentator said "the scene was mayhem."

When you have a true testimony of one who has truly been changed by Jesus Christ, there will be some very religious people who will hate it and hate you. The real reason is that you have a dynamic relationship with God and they do not.

SECTION #2 – Paul speaks to the Roman guard and they react. **22:24-29**

Well the commander of the Roman guard decided they would drag Paul in and scourge him to find out why all of these Jews were against him. The real reason these Jews hate Paul is because he is right with Jesus Christ and they aren't. Paul promotes grace and they love law.

According to **verse 25**, they were stretching out Paul on some rack to scourge him. This scourging was done with a leather whip that had pieces of metal and bone at the end. This scourging often resulted in the prisoner dying. In fact, one writer said if the man didn't die he was crippled for life (John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 349).

All citizens of Rome were exempt from this kind of punishment and they were guaranteed protection and so when Paul said it is legal to scourge an uncondemned Roman, this would have meant something.

When the centurion heard that (**verse 26**), he went to the commander and told him "this man is a Roman." According to **verse 27**, the commander went to Paul to see if this was true and Paul said "yes." Well the commander said "I got my citizenship by paying a lot of money," but Paul said "I was born a Roman citizen" (**verse 28**). So according to **verse 29** they let him go and called for a meeting of the Sanhedrin to determine what the trouble was.

What is so sad is that the Romans, who are heathens, seem to be more interested in truth than the Jews who are very religious.

Our job is to witness, but we must always leave the results to God.