**ACTS & US**

*Acts 22 – “The Word of Your Testimony”*

Previously (Acts 21) Paul returned to Jerusalem. He received a warm welcome from the believers there. He told them about all the wonderful things God had done among the Gentiles in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and other places. The Jerusalem believers rejoiced at this; however they warned Paul that the word on the street is that He is teaching Gentile believers to disregard the law of Moses.

Most of these accusations against Paul came from the same enemies that were chasing him from city to city in Asia Minor (Derbe, Iconium, Lystra, etc.)

**Acts 21:27**“When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, **28**shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place.”

These accusers stirred up a riot against Paul and tried to kill him. It stirred up so much pandemonium, that the romans arrested Paul to keep him safe and find out more about the charges against him. After this arrest, Paul would spend most of his remaining days in custody of the Romans and eventually executed in a Roman prison.

**ACTS 22:1-5**

**1**“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”

**2**When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: **3**“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. **4**I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, **5**as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.”

He addresses them as “one of their own”. He describes to them his pedigree, how he was a rare Roman-Jew who studied under the most highly respected rabbi, Gamaliel. He even told them of the persecution that took place under his authority as a Pharisee.

Next, he is about to tell them his testimony of what happened to him when He encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. This is the 2nd of three times that this experience is recorded in Acts, the first time was a biographical account by Luke. This time, and again in Chapter 26 are autobiographical told, in his own words.

**ACTS 22:6-21 6**“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. **7**I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

**8**“‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. **9**My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

**10**“‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ **11**My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

**12**“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. **13**He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

**14**“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. **15**You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. **16**And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

**17**“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance **18**and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’

**19**“‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. **20**And when the blood of your martyrStephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

**21**“Then the Lord said to me, ‘*Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’* ”

Up until he said that the Lord told him “*Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”* The crowd listened intently, after he spoke those words, chaos ensued.

**ACTS 22:22-25 22 “**The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

**23**As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, **24**the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. **25**As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”

These Jews had such a hatred in their hearts for the Gentiles, and now for Paul for extending the promise of Israel to the Gentiles, that they were willing to kill him on the spot.

**ACTS 22:26-29 26 “**When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”

**27**The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes, I am,” he answered.

**28**Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.”

“But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.

**29**Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.”

Remember, Paul is from Tarsus of Cilicia. This is a Roman Province and those born there were considered Roman citizens, not subjects. Just like in the town of Thessalonica in Acts 16, when the guards heard that he was a Roman citizen, they became fearful because they had treated him improperly.

**Paul Before the Sanhedrin**

**ACTS 22:30 “**The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.”

Paul had a chance to talk his way out of this. He could have tried to appease the jews by telling them what they wanted to hear. He could have found things that they all agreed on and only spoke of those. He could have immediately tried to vindicate himself and perhaps even bring counter charges against the Jews from Asia who were tormenting him, and tried to kill him. He could have started his speech with a defense testimony about each of the charges being railed against him, or focused on the fact that he was jailed and mistreated as a Roman citizen.

Instead he, told his testimony of how he met Jesus.

That experience was so impactful to him, that he felt it was the most important thing he could share with them.

He used the opportunity to talk about what happened to him during the Damascus Road experience.

**ACTS 22:6-15**

**6**“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. **7**

I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

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**14**“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.

**15**You will *be his witness* to all people of what you have seen and heard.

“Be His *Witness”*

This is exactly what Jesus told His apostles in His final words to them.

**Acts 1:8** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will *be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

What is a “witness” – Someone who declares what they believe to be true.

Examples:

* *Court of Law – “The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”*
* *Laundry Detergent commercial - “It makes my whites whiter”.*

We can all *be witnesses* to what is true on our own lives.

Examples:

* Speaking to a Pastor I recently met. He wanted to know about me, not my denomination. *“Tell me how you came to faith”.* (Isn’t this the most important thing we should ask someone we are trying to get to know?)
* Ron in OG – Recently saved. He’s in a tough spot, jobless, bordering on homeless, but he is very encouraged and grateful with the opportunities he has to “tell everybody what God has done for me.”

Do you know *your* testimony?

*How were you saved? What happened to make you follow Jesus?*

Have you told it, written it down, or committed it to memory?

Your testimony may be the most effective and important message you can offer.

Your testimony is not predicated on your ability to memorize scripture, your theological training, or a comprehensive understanding of the law and doctrine.

It’s based on your experience with Jesus, and what you believe to be true.

Jesus came across a man on the Sabbath who was born blind. He decided to heal the man in a peculiar way. He mixed spit and mud together and rubbed it in the man’s eyes. He told him to go wash the [schmutz] off his eyes in the pool of Siloam, and when he did, he was healed.

**John 9:16-25** “Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided.

**17**Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.” **18**They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. **19**“Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

**20**“We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. **21**But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” **22**His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. **23**That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

**24**A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

**25**He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

How about you?

You probably know more about Jesus than this man did. You know that He is the Messiah, the Son of God who died, and rose again to offer us everlasting life.

You also know that “you once were blind and now you see”.

*That’s* your testimony.

It’s the story of what Jesus has done in your life. You are the authority on that subject, No one is an expert on your experience but you, no one can take that away from you.

Whether it’s impressive and extraordinary, OR seemingly mundane.

It’s YOUR testimony! - ***Speak it. Post it. Tell it. Preach it***

It’s more powerful than you may even realize.

Revelation 12 talks about a “war in Heaven”, where Satan is hurled down to earth, and the brothers and sisters he had been accusing, became victorious.

**Rev. 12:10-11 “10**Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

**11**They triumphed over him by the *blood of the Lamb* and by the **word of their testimony**; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

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